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FEATURE NOVEL

by L. Sprague de Camp

THE LONG RETURN

FEATURE NOVEL

by Poul Anderson

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FUTURE

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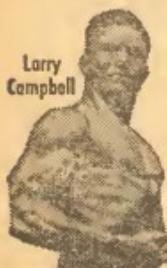
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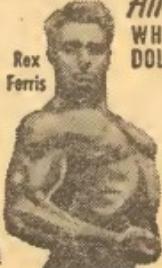
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**WIDE-OPEN
PLANET**
FEATURE NOVEL
*by L. Sprague
de Camp*

(illustration by Finlay)

Interplanetary law was strict: Planets like Krishna were to be considered static civilizations, and Earthmen were forbidden to introduce any machinery or mechanical improvements there. Any progress must come from the natives themselves. But to men like Felix Borel, Krishna was a wide-open planet for the imaginative entrepreneur. And Borel had a program well suited to the maze of intrigue and double-cross that was Krishna's politics and social milieu!

Borel stood helplessly, holding his spear poised, mouth hanging open.



MY GOOD Senhor," said Abreu, "where the devil did you get those? Raid half the Earth's pawnshops?" He bent closer to look at the decorations on Felix Borel's chest. "Teutonic Order, French Legion of Honor, Third World War, Public Service Award of North America, Fourth Degree of the Knights of St. Stephen, Danish Order of the Elephant, something-or-other from Japan, Intercollegiate Basketball Championship, Pistol Championship of the Policia do Rio de Janeiro... Tamates, what a collection!

Borel smiled sardonically down on the fat little security officer. "You never can tell. I might be a basketball champion."

"What are you going to do, sell these things to the poor ignorant Krishnans?"

"I might, if I ran short. Or maybe I'll just dazzle them so they'll give me whatever I ask for."

"Humph. I admit that in that private uniform, with all those medals and orders, you're an awe-inspiring spectacle."

Borel, amusedly watching Abreu fume, knew that the latter was sore because he had not been able to find any excuse to hold Borel at Novorecife. *Thank God*, thought Borel, *the universe is not yet so carefully organized that personal influence can't perform a trick or two.* He would have liked to do Abreu a bad turn if for no better reason than that he harbored an irrational prejudice against Brazzies, as though it were Abreu's fault that his native country was the Earth's leading power.

Borel grinned at the bureaucrat. "You'd be surprised how helpful this—uh—costume of mine has been. Flunkeys at spaceports assume I'm at least Chief of Staff of the World Federation. 'Step this way, Senhor! Come to the head of the line, Senhor!' More fun than a circus."

Abreu sighed. "Well, I can't stop you. I still think you'd have a better chance of survival disguised as a Krishnan, though."

"And wear a green wig, and false feelers on my forehead? No thanks."

"That's your funeral. However, remember Regulation 368 of the Interplanetary Council rules. You know it?"

"Sure. *'It is forbidden to communicate to any native resident of the planet Krishna any device, appliance, machine, tool, weapon, or invention representing an improvement upon the science and technics already in existence upon this planet...'* Want me to go on?"

"Nao, you know it. Remember that while the *Viagens Interplanetarias* will ordinarily let you alone once you leave Novorecife, we'll go to any length to prevent and punish any violation of that rule. That's Council orders."

Borel yawned. "I understand. If the type has finished X-raying my baggage, I'll be pushing off. What's the best route to Mishe at present?"

"You could go straight through the Kolof Swamps, but the wilder tribes of the Kolofuma sometimes kill travellers for their goods. You'd better take a raft down the Pichide to Quo, and follow the road southwest from there to Mishe."

"Obrigado. The Republic of Mikardand is on a gold standard, isn't it?"

"Pois sim."

"And what's gold at Novorecife worth in terms of World Federation dollars on Earth?"

"Oh, Deus meu! That takes a higher mathematician to calculate, what with freight and interest and the balance of trade."

"Just approximately," persisted Borel.

"As I remember, a little less than two dollars a gram."

Borel stood up and shook back his red hair with a characteristic gesture. He gathered up his papers. "Adeus, Senhor Cristovao; you've been most helpful."

He smiled broadly as he said this, for Abreu had obviously wanted to be anything but helpful and was still gently simmering over his failure to halt Borel's invasion of Krishna.

THE NEXT DAY found Felix Borel drifting down the Pichide on a timber-raft under the tall clouds that paraded across the greenish sky of Krishna. Next to him crouched the Kolofty servant he had hired at Novorecife, tailed and monstrously ugly.

A brisk shower had just ended. Borel stood up and shook drops off his cloak as the big yellow sun struck them. Yerevats did likewise, grumbling in broken Gozashtandou: "If master do like I say, put on poor man clothes, could take tow-boat and stay close to shore. Then when rain come, could put up tar-paulin. No get wet, no be afraid robbers."

"That's my responsibility," replied Borel, moving about to get his circulation going again. He gazed off to starboard, where the low shore of the Pichide broke up into a swarm of reedy islets. "What's that?" he asked, pointing.

"Koloft Swamps," said Yerevats.

"Your people live there?"

"No, not by river. Further back. By river is all *ujero*." (He gave the Koloftou name for the quasi-human people of the planet, whom most Earthmen thought of simply as Krishans because they were the dominant species.) "Robbers," he added.

Borel, looking at the dark horizontal stripe of reeds between sky and water, wondered if he'd been wise to reject Yerevats's advice to buy the full panoply of a *garm* or knight. Yerevats, he suspected had been hoping for a fancy suit of armor for himself. Borel had turned down the idea on grounds of expense and weight; suppose one fell into the Pichide in all that stove-piping? Also, he now admitted to himself, he had succumbed to Earthly prejudice against medieval Krishnan weapons, since one Earthly bomb could easily wipe out a whole Krishnan city and one gun mow down a whole army. Perhaps he hadn't given enough weight to the fact that where he was going, no Earthly bombs or guns would be available.

Too late now for might-have-beens. Borel checked over the arm-

ament he had finally bought: a sword for himself, as much a badge of status as a protection. A cheap mace with a wooden handle and a star-shaped iron head for Yerevats. Sheath-knives of general utility for both. Finally, a crossbow. Privately Borel, no swashbuckler, hoped that any fighting they did would be at as long a range as possible. He had tried drawing a longbow in the Outfitting Shop at Novorecife, but in his unskilled grip it bobbed about too much, and would have required more practice than he had time for.

Borel folded his cloak, laid it on his barracks bag, and sat down to go over his plans again. The only flaw he could see lay in the matter of getting an entree to the Order of Qarar after he arrived at Mishe. Once he'd made friends with members of the Brotherhood, the rest should be easy. By all accounts the Mikardanduma were natural-born suckers. But how to take that first step? He'd probably have to improvise after he got there.

Once he'd gotten over that first hurdle, his careful preparation and experience in rackets like this would see him through. And the best part would be that he'd have the laugh on old Abreu, who could do absolutely nothing about it. Since Borel considered honesty a sign of stupidity, and since Abreu was not stupid for all his pompous ways, Borel assumed that Abreu must be out for what he could get like other wise joes, and that his moral attitudes and talk of principles were mere hypocritical pretence.

"Ao!" The shout of one of the raftmen broke into Borel's reverie. The Krishnan was pointing off towards the right bank, where a boat was emerging from among the islets.

Yerevats jumped, up, shading his eyes with his hairy hand. "Robbers!" he said.

"How can you tell from here?" asked Borel, a horrid fear making his heart pound.

"Just know. You see," said the Koloftu, his tail twitching nervously. He looked appealingly at Borel. "Brave master kill robbers? No let them hurt us?"

"Sh-sure," said Borel. He pulled out his sword halfway, looked at the blade, and shoved it back into its scabbard, more as a nervous gesture than anything else.

"Ohe!" said one of the raftmen. "Think you to fight the robbers?"

"I suppose so," said Borel.

"No, you shall not! If we make no fight, they will slay only you, for we are but poor men."

"Is that so?" said Borel. The adrenalin being poured into his system made him contrary, and his voice rose. "So you think I'll let my throat be cut quietly to save yours, huh? I'll show you *baghanal!*" The sword whipped out of the scabbard, and the flat slapped the raftman on the side of the head, staggering him. "We'll fight whether you like it or not! I'll kill the first coward myself!" He was screaming at the three raftmen, now huddled together fearfully. "Make a barricade of the baggage! Move that stove forward!" He stood over them, shouting and swishing the air with his sword, until they had arranged the movables in a rough square.

"Now," said Borel more calmly, "bring your poles and crouch down inside there. You too, Yerevats. I'll try to hold them off with the bow. If they board us anyway, we'll jump out and rush them when I give the signal. Understand?"

THE BOAT had been slanting out from the shore on a course converging toward that of the raft. Now Borel, peering over the edge of his barricade, could make out the individuals in it. There was one in the bow, another in the stern, and the rest rowing—perhaps twenty in all.

"Is time to cock bow," muttered Yerevats.

The others looked nervously over their shoulders as if wondering whether the river offered a better chance of safety than battle.

Borel said: "I wouldn't try to swim ashore. You know the monsters of the Pichide." Which only made them look unhappier.

Borel put his foot into the stirrup at the muzzle end of the crossbow

and cocked the device with both hands and a grunt. Then he opened the bandoleer he had bought with the bow and took out one of the bolts: an iron rod a span long, with a notch at one end, and at the other a flattened, diamond-shaped head with a twist to make the missile spin in its flight. He inserted the bolt into its groove.

The boat came closer and closer. The man in the front end called across the water: "Surrender!"

"Keep quiet," said Borel softly to his companions. By now he was so keyed up that he was almost enjoying the excitement.

Again the man in the boat hailed: "Surrender and we'll not hurt you! This only your goods we want!"

Still no reply from the raft.

"For the last time, give up, or we'll torture you all to death!"

Borel shifted the crossbow to cover the man in the front. Damn, why hadn't these gloops put sights on their gadgets? He'd take a few practice shots at a piece of paper the day before and thought himself pretty good. Now, however, his target seemed to shrink to mosquito size every time he tried to draw a bead on it, and something must be shaking the raft to make the weapon waver so.

The man in the bow of the boat had produced an object like a small anchor with extra flukes, tied to the end of a rope. He held this dangling while the grunting oarsmen brought the boat swiftly towards the raft, then whirled it around his head.

Borel shut his eyes and jerked the trigger. The string snapped loudly and the stick kicked back against his shoulder. One of the raftmen whooped.

When Borel opened his eyes, the man in the front of the boat was no longer whirling the grapnel. Instead he was looking back towards the stern, where the man who had sat at the tiller had slumped down. The rowers were resting on their oars and jabbering excitedly.

"Great master hit robber captain!" said Yerevats. "Better cock bow again."

Borel stood up to do so. Evidently

he had missed the man he aimed at and instead hit the man in the stern. However, he said nothing to disillusion his servant about his marksmanship.

The boat had reorganized and was coming on again, another robber having taken the place of the one at the tiller. This time there were two Krishnans in front, one with the grapnel and the other with a longbow.

"Keep your heads down," said Borel, and shot at the archer; the bolt flew far over the man's head. Borel started to get up to reload, then realized that he'd be making a fine target. Could you cock these damned things sitting down? The archer let fly his shaft, which passed Borel's head with a frightening whisht. Borel hastily found that he could cock his crossbow in a sitting position, albeit a little awkwardly. Another arrow thudded into the baggage.

BOREL SHED his military-style cap as too tempting a target and sighted on the boat again. Another miss, and the boat came closer. The archer was letting off three arrows to every one of Borel's bolts, though Borel surmised that he was doing so to cover their approach rather than with hope of hitting anybody.

Borel shot again; this time the bolt banged into the planking of the boat. The man with the grapnel was whirling it once more, and another arrow screeched past.

"Hey," said Borel to one of the raftmen, "you with the hatchet! When the grapnel comes aboard, jump out and cut the rope. You other two, get ready to push the boat off with your poles."

"But the arrows—" bleated the first man spoken to.

"I'll take care of that," said Borel with more confidence than he felt.

The archer had drawn another arrow but was holding it steady instead of releasing it. As the boat came within range of the grapnel, the man whirling it let go. It landed on the raft with a thump. Then the man who had thrown it began to pull

it in hand over hand until one of the flukes caught in a log.

Borel looked around frantically for some way of the tempting the archer to shoot, since otherwise the first to stand up on the raft would be a sitting duck. He seized his cap and raised it above the edge of the barricade. Snap! and another arrow hissed by.

"Go to it!" shrieked Borel, and sighted on the archer. His crew hesitated. The archer reached back to his quiver for another arrow, and Borel, forcing himself to be calm, drew a bead on the man's body and squeezed.

The man gave a loud animal cry, between a grunt and a scream, and doubled over.

"Go on!" yelled Borel again, raising the crossbow as if to beat the raftmen over the head with it. They sprang into life; one severed the rope with a chop of his hatchet while the other two poked at the boat with their poles.

The remaining man in the front of the boat dropped his rope, shouted something to the rowers, and bent to pick up a boathook. Borel shot at him, but let himself get excited and missed, though it was practically spitting-distance. When the boathook caught in the logs, the man hauled the bow of the boat closer, while a few of the forward rowers stopped rowing to cluster around him with weapons ready.

In desperation Borel dropped his crossbow, grabbed the end of the boathook, wrenched it out of the wood, and jerked it towards himself. The man on the other end held on a second too long and toppled into the water, still gripping the shaft. Borel pulled on it with some idea of wrenching it away and reversing it to spear the man in the water. However, the latter held on and was hauled to the edge of the raft, where he made as though to climb aboard. Meanwhile the raftmen had again pushed the boat away with their poles, so that those who had been gathering themselves to jump across thought better of the idea.

Thump! Yerevats brought his

mace down on the head of the man in the water, and the mop of green hair sank beneath the surface.

The raftmen were now yelling triumphantly in their own dialect. A robber, however, had picked up the longbow from the bottom of the boat and was fumbling with an arrow. Borel, recovering his crossbow, took pains with his next shot and made a hit just as the new archer let fly. The arrow went wild and the archer disappeared, to bob up again a second later cursing and holding his shoulder.

Borel cocked his crossbow again and aimed at the man in the boat. This time, however, instead of shooting, he simply pointed it at one man after another. Each man in turn tried to duck down behind the thwarts, so that organized rowing became impossible.

"Had enough?" called Borel.

The robbers were arguing again, until finally one called out: "All right, don't shoot; we'll let you go." The oars resumed their regular rhythm, and the boat swung away towards the swamp. When it was safely out of range some of the robbers yelled back threats and insults, which Borel could not understand at the distance.

The raftmen were slapping each other's backs, shouting: "We're good! Said I not we could lick a hundred robbers?" Yerevats babbled about his wonderful master.

Borel felt suddenly weak and shaky. If a mouse, or whatever they had on Krishna that corresponded to a mouse, were to climb aboard and squeak at him, he was sure he'd leap into the muddy Pichide in sheer terror. However, it wouldn't do to show that. With trembling hands he inserted a cigarette into his long jewelled holder and lit it. Then he said: "Yerevats, my damned boots seem to have gotten scuffed. Give them a shine, will you?"

2

THEY TIED up at Qou that evening to spend the night. Felix Borel paid off the raft-

men, whom he overheard before he retired telling the innkeeper how they had (with some help from the Earthman) beaten off a hundred river-pirates and slain scores. Next morning he bade them goodby as they pushed off down the river for Madjbur at the mouth of the Pichide, where they meant to sell their logs and catch a towboat back home.

Four long Krishnan days later Borel was pacing the roof of his inn in Mishe. The capitol of the Republic of Mikardand had proved a bigger city than he had expected. In the middle rose a sharp-edged mesa-like hill surmounted by the great citadel of the Order of Qarar. The citadel frowned down upon Borel, who frowned right back as he cast and rejected one plan after another for penetrating not only the citadel but also the ruling caste whose stronghold it was.

He called: "Yerevats!"

"Yes, master?"

"The *Garma Qararuma* toil not, neither do they spin, do they?"

"Guardians work? No sir! Run country, protect common people from enemies and from each other. That enough, not?"

"Maybe, but that's not what I'm after. How are these Guardians supported?"

"Collect taxes from common people."

"I thought so. Who collects these taxes?"

"Squires of Order. Work for treasurer of Order."

"Who's he?" asked Borel.

"Is most noble *garm Kubanan*."

"Where could I find the most noble Sir Kubanan?"

"If he in citadel, no can see. If in treasury office, can."

"Where's the treasury office?"

Yerevats waved vaguely. "That way. Master want go?"

"Right. Get out the buggy, will you?"

Yerevats disappeared, and presently they were rattling over the cobblestone towards the treasury office in the light one-aya four-wheeled carriage Borel had bought in Qou. It had occurred to him at the time

that one pictured a gallant knight as pricking o'er the plain on his foaming steed rather than sitting comfortably behind the steed in a buggy. However, since the latter procedure promised to be pleasanter, and Yerevats knew how to drive, Borel had taken a chance on the Mikardanders' prejudices.

The treasury office was in one of the big graceless rough-stone buildings that the Qararuma used as their official architectural style. The doorway was flanked by a pair of rampant stone yekis: the dominant carnivores of this part of the planet, something like a six-legged mink blown up to tiger-size. Borel had had the wits scared out of him by hearing the roar of one on his drive down from Quo.

Borel gathered up his sword, got down from the buggy, assumed his loftiest expression, and asked the doorman: "Where do I find the receiver of taxes, my good man?"

In accordance with the doorman's directions he followed a hall in the building until he discovered a window in the side of the hall, behind which sat a man in the drab dress of the commoners of Mikardand.

Borel said: "I wish to see whether I owe the Republic any taxes. I don't wish to discuss it with you, though; fetch your superior."

The clerk scuttled off with a look compounded of fright and resentment. Presently another face and torso appeared at the window. The torso was clad in the gay coat of a member of the Order of Qarar, but judging from the smallness of the dragonlike emblem on the chest, the man was only a squire or whatever you'd call the grade below the true *garma*.

"Oh, not you," said Borel. "The head of the department."

The squire frowned so that the antennae sprouting from between his brows crossed. "Who are you, anyhow?" he said. "The receiver of taxes am I. If you have anything to pay—"

"My dear fellow," said Borel, "I'm not criticising you, but as a past Grand Master of an Earthly Order and a member of several others, I'm not accustomed to dealing with underlings. You will kindly tell the head of your department that the *garm* Felix Borel is here."

TH E M A N went off shaking his head in a baffled manner. Presently another man with a knight's insignia stepped through a door into the corridor and advanced with hand outstretched.

"My dear sir!" he said. "Will you step into my chamber? 'Tis a pleasure extraordinary to meet a true knight from Earth. I knew not that such lived there; the *Ertsuma* who have come to Mikardand speak strange subversive doctrines of liberty and equality for the commonality—even those who claim the rank, like that Sir Erik Koskelainen. One can tell you're a man of true quality."

"Thank you," said Borel. "I knew that one of the *Garma Qararuma* would know me as spiritually one of themselves, even though I belong to another race."

The knight bowed. "And now what's this about your wishing to pay taxes? When I first heard it I believed it not; in all the history of the Republic no man has ever offered to pay taxes of his own will."

Borel smiled. "I didn't say I actually wanted to pay them. But I'm new here and wanted to know my rights and obligations. That's all. Better to get them straightened out at the start, don't you think?"

"Yes—but—are you he who came hither from Quo but now?"

"Yes."

"He who slew Ushyarian the river-pirate and his lieutenant in battle on the Pichide?"

Borel waved a deprecating hand. "That was nothing. One can't let such rogues run loose, you know. I'd have wiped out the lot, but one can't chase malefactors with a timber-raft."

The Qararu jumped up. "Then the reward is due you!"

"Reward?"

"Why, knew you not? A reward of ten thousand karda was lain on the head of Ushyarian for years! I must see about the verification of your claim..."

Borel, thinking quickly, said: "Don't bother. I don't really want it."

"You don't *wish* it?" The man stared blankly.

"No. I only did a gentleman's duty, and I don't need it."

"But—the money's here—it's been appropriated—"

"Well, give it to some worthy cause. Don't you have charities in Mishe?"

The knight finally pulled himself together. "Extraordinary. You must meet the treasurer himself. As for taxes—let me see—there is a residence tax on metics, while on the other hand we have treaties with Gozashtand and some of the other states to exempt each other's gentlefolk. I know not how that would affect you—but concern yourself not, in view of your action in the matter of the reward. I'll put it up to the treasurer. Can you wait?"

"Sure. Mind if I smoke?"

"Not at all. Have one of these." The knight dug a bunch of Krishnan cigars out of a desk drawer.

AFTER A few minutes, the official returned and asked Borel to come to the treasurer's office, where he introduced the Earthman to the treasurer of the Order. Sir Kubanan was that rarity among Krishnans, a stout man, looking a little like a beardless Santa Claus.

The previous conversation more or less repeated itself, except that the treasurer proved a garrulous old party with a tendency to ramble. He seemed fascinated by Borel's medals.

"This?" said Borel, indicating the basketball medal. "Oh, that's the second degree of the Secret Order of Spooks. Very secret and very powerful; only admits men who've been acquitted of a murder charge..."

"Wonderful, wonderful," said Kubanan at last. "My dear sir, we will

find a way around this tax matter, fear not. Perish the thought that one so chivalrous as yourself should be taxed like a vulgar commoner, even though the Order be sore pressed for funds."

This was the opening Borel had been waiting for. He pounced. "The Order would like additional sources of revenue?"

"Why, yes. Of course we're all sworn to poverty and obedience." (He contemplated his glittering assortment of rings) "and hold all in common, even our women and children. Nevertheless, the defense of the Republic puts a heavy burden upon us."

"Have you thought of a state lottery?"

"What might that be?"

Borel explained, rattling through the details as fast as his fair command of the language allowed.

"Wonderful," said Kubanan. "I fear I could not follow your description at all times, though; you do speak with an accent. Could you put it in writing for us?"

"Sure. In fact I can do better than that."

"How mean you?"

"Well, to give you an example, it's much easier to tell how to ride an aya than to do it, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Just so, it's easy to tell you how a lottery works—but it takes practical experience to run one."

"How can we surmount that difficulty?"

"I could organize and run your first lottery."

"Sir Felix, you quite take my breath away. Could you write down the amounts involved in this scheme?"

Borel wrote down a rough estimate of the sums he might expect to take in and pay out in a city of this size. Kubanan, frowning, said: "What's this ten percent for the Director?"

"That's the incentive. If you're going to run this thing in a business-like manner after I've left, we'd better set it up right. And one must have an incentive. The first time I'd be the director, naturally."

"I see. That's not unreasonable. But since members of the Order aren't allowed private funds beyond mere pocket-money, how would the commission act as incentive?"

Borel shrugged. "You'd have to figure that one out. Maybe you'd better hire a commoner to run the show. I suppose there are merchants and bankers among them, aren't there?"

"True. Amazing. We must discuss this further. Won't you come to my chambers this evening to sup? I'll pass you in to the citadel."

Borel tried to hide his grin of triumph as he said: "It's my turn to be overwhelmed, your excellency!" The Borel luck!

AT THE appointed hour Borel, having presented his pass at the gate of the citadel, was taken in tow by a uniformed guide. Inside Mishe's Kremlin stood a lot of huge plain stone buildings wherein the Guardians led their antlike existence. Borel walked past playgrounds and exercise-grounds, and identified other buildings as apartment-houses, armories, office-buildings, and an auditorium. It was just as well to memorize such details in case a slip-up should require a hasty retreat. Borel had once spent six months as a guest of the French Republic in consequence of failing to observe this precaution. He passed hundreds of gorgeously arrayed *garma* of both sexes. Some looked at him sharply, but none offered interference.

For the quarters of one sworn to poverty, the treasurer's apartment was certainly sumptuous. Kubanan cordially introduced Borel to a young female Mikardandu who quite took his breath away. If one didn't mind green hair, feathery antennae, and a somewhat flat-featured Oriental look, she was easily the most beautiful thing he'd seen since Earth, especially since the Mikardandu evening-dress began at the midriff.

"Sir Felix, my confidential secretary, the Lady Zerdai." Kubanan lowered his voice in mock-confidence. "I think she's my own daughter, though naturally one can never know for sure."

"Then family feeling does exist among the Guardians?" said Borel.

"Yes, I fear me it does. A shameful weakness, but nathless a most pleasant one. Heigh-ho, at times I envy the commoners. Why, Zerdai herself has somehow bribed the women in charge of the incubator to show her which is her own authentic egg."

Zerdai sparkled at them. "I was down there but today, and the maids tell me it's due to hatch in another fifteen days!"

"Ahem," said Borel. "Would it be good manners to ask who's papa? Excuse me if I pull a boner occasionally; I'm not entirely oriented yet."

Kubanan said: "No offense, sir. He was Sir Sardu, the predecessor of Sir Shurgez, was he not, Zerdai?"

"Yes," she agreed. "But our petty affairs must seem dull to a galaxy-traveller like you, Six Felix. Tell us of the Earth! I've long dreamed of going thither; I can fancy nought more glamorous than seeing the New York Stock Exchange, or the Moscow Art Theater, or the Shanghai night-clubs with my own eyes. It must be wonderful to ride in a power-vehicle! To talk to somebody miles distant! And all those marvelous inventions and factories..."

Kubanan said dryly: "I sometimes think Lady Zerdai shows an unbecoming lack of pride in her Order, young though she be. Now about this lottery: will you see to having the certificates printed?"

"Certainly," said Borel. "So you do have a printing-press here?"

"Yes; from the Earthmen we got it. We'd have preferred a few Earthly weapons to smite our enemies; but no, all they'll let us have is this device, which bodes ill for our social order. Should the commoners learn reading, who knows what mad ideas this ill-starred machine may spread among them?"

BOREL TURNED on the charm, thankful that supper consisted of some of the more palatable Krishnan dishes. On this planet you were liable to have something like a giant cockroach set before you as a

treat. Afterwards all three lit cigars and talked while sipping a liqueur.

Kubanan continued: "Sir Felix, you're old enough in the ways of the world to know that a man's pretext is often other than his true reason. Your Earthmen tell me they hide their sciences from us because our culture is yet too immature—by which they mean our gladiatorial shows, our trials by combat, our warring national sovereignties, our social inequalities, and the like. Now, I say not that they're altogether wrong—I for one should be glad had they never introduced this accursed printing-press. But the question I'd ask you is: What's their real reason?"

Borel wrinkled his forehead in the effort of composing a suitable reply. Being an adventurer and no intellectual he'd never troubled his head much about such abstract questions. At last, he said: "Perhaps they're afraid the Krishnans, with their warlike traditions, would learn to make space-ships and attack their neighboring planets."

"A fantastic idea," said Kubanan. "'Tis not so long since there was a tremendous uproar over the question of whether the planets were inhabited. The churches had been assuring us that the planets were the very gods, and crucifying heretics who said otherwise. No wonder we hailed as gods the first beings from Earth and the other planets of your sun!"

Borel murmured a polite assent, privately thinking that the first expedition to this system ought, if they had any sense, to have been satisfied with being gods and not go disillusioning the Krishnans. That's what came of letting a bunch of sappy do-gooders...

Kubanan was going on: "Our problem is much more immediate. We're hemmed and beset by enemies. Across the Pichide lies Gozashtand, whose ruler has been taking an unfriendly line of late; and Madjbur City is a veritable hotbed of plots and stratagems. If a way could be found to get us—let's say—one gun, which our clever smiths could copy,

there's nothing the Order would not do..."

So, thought Borel, that's why the old boy is so hospitable to a mere stranger. He said: "I see your point, excellency. You know the risks, don't you?"

"The greater the risk, the greater the reward."

"True, but it would require most careful thought. I'll let you know when I've had time to think."

"I understand." Kubanan rose, and to Borel's surprise said: "I leave you now; Kuri will think I've forgotten her utterly. You'll stay the night, of course?"

"Why, I—thank you, your excellency. I'll have to send a note out to my man."

"Yes, yes, I'll send you a page. Meanwhile the Lady Zerdai shall keep you company, or if you've a mind to read there are ample books on the shelves. Take the second room on the left."

BOREL murmured his thanks and the treasurer departed, his furred robe floating behind him. Then, having no interest whatever in Kubanan's library, he sat down near Zerdai.

Eyes aglow, Zerdai said: "Now that we need talk finance no more, tell me of the Earth. How live you? I mean, what's your system of personal relationships? Have you homes and families like the commoners, or all in common as we Guardians do?"

As Borel explained, the girl sighed. With a far-away look she said: "Could I but go thither! I can imagine nought more romantic than to be an Earthly housewife with a home and a man and children of my own! And a telephone!"

Borel reflected that some Earthly housewives sang a different tune, but said gently: "Couldn't you resign from the Order?"

"In theory, yes—but 'tis hardly ever done. 'Twould be like stepping into another world, and what sort of welcome would the commoners give? Would they not resent what they'd call one's airs? And to have to face the scorn of all Guardians... No, it would not do. Could one escape

this world entire, as by journeying to Earth..."

"Maybe that could be arranged too," said Borel cautiously. While he was willing to promise her anything to enlist her cooperation and then ditch her, he didn't want to get involved in more schemes at once than he could handle.

"Really?" she said, glowing at him. "There's nought I wouldn't do..."

Borel thought, *they all say there's nothing they wouldn't do if I'll only get them what they want.* He said: "I may need help on some of my projects here. Can I count on your assistance?"

"With all my heart!"

"Good. I'll see that you don't regret it. We'd make a wonderful team, don't you think? With your beauty and my experience there's nothing we couldn't get away with. Can't you see us cutting a swath through the galaxy?"

She leaned toward him, breathing hard. "You're wonderful!"

He smiled. "Not really. You are."

"No, you."

"No, you. You've got beauty, brains, nerve— Oh well, I'll have plenty of chance to tell you in the future. When I get this lottery organized."

"Oh." This seemed to bring her back to Krishna again. She glanced at the time-candle and put out her cigar, saying: "Great stars, I had no idea the hour was so late! I must go to bed, Sir Felix the Red. Will you escort me to my room?"

3

AT BREAKFAST Sir Kubanan said: "Thanks to the stars the Grand Council meets this forenoon. I'll bring up your lottery suggestion, and if they approve we can start work on it today. Why spend you not the morning laying your plans?"

"A splendid idea, excellency," said Borel, and went to work, after breakfast on the design of lottery tickets and advertising posters. Zerdai hung around, asking if she couldn't help, trying to cuddle up beside him and

getting in the way of his pen arm, all the time looking at him with such open adoration that even he, normally as embarrassable as a rhinoceros, squirmed a little under her gaze.

However, he put up with it in a good cause, to wit: the cause of making a killing for Felix E. Borel.

By the middle of the day Kubanan was back jubilant. "They approved! At first Grand Master Djuvain boggled a little, but I talked him round. He liked not letting one not of our Order so deep into our affairs, saying, how can there be a secret Order if all its secrets be known? But I bridled him. How goes the plan?"

Borel showed him the layouts. The treasurer said: "Wonderful! Wonderful! Carry on, my boy, and come to me for aught you need."

"I will. This afternoon I'll arrange for printing this stuff. Then we'll need a booth. How about setting it up at the lower end of that little street up to the gate of the citadel? And I'll have to train a couple of men as ticket-sellers, and some more to guard the money."

"All shall be done. Hearken, why move you not hither from your present lodgings? I have ample room, and 'twould save time as well as augment comfort, thus slaying two unhas with one bolt."

"Do come," sighed Zerdai.

"Okay. Where can I stable my aya and quarter my servant?"

Kubanan told him. The afternoon he spent making arrangements for printing. Since Mishe had but two printers, each with one little hand press, the job would not be finished for at least twenty days.

HE REPORTED this to Kubanan at supper, adding: "Will you give me a draft on the treasury of the Order for fifteen hundred karda to cover the initial costs?" (This was more than fifty percent over the prices the printers had quoted, but Kubanan assented without question.)

"And now," continued Borel, "let's take up the other matter. If Zerdai's your confidential secretary, I don't

suppose you mind discussing it in front of her."

"Not at all. You've found a way to get around the technological blockade?"

"Well—yes and no. I can assure you it'll do no good for me to go to Novorecife and try to smuggle out a gun or plans for one. They have a machine that looks right through you, and they make you stand in front of it before letting you out."

"Have they no regard for privacy?"

"Not in this matter. Besides, even if one did succeed, they'd send an agent to bring one back dead or alive."

"Of those agents I've heard," said Kubanan with a slight shudder.

"Moreover I'm no engineer—a base-born trade—so I can't carry a set of plans in my head for your people to work from. Guns are too complicated for that."

"What then?"

"I think the only way is to have something they want so badly they'll ease up on the blockade in return for it."

"Yes, but what have we? There's little of ours that they covet. Even gold, they say, is much too heavy to haul billions of miles to Earth with profit, and almost everything we make, they can make more cheaply at home once they know how. I know; I've discussed it with the *Viagens* folk at Novorecife. Knight though I be, my office requires that I interest myself in such base commercial matters."

Borel drew on his cigar and remarked: "Earthmen are an inventive lot, and they'll continue thinking up new things for a long time to come."

Kubanan shuddered. "A horrid place must this Earth of yours be. No stability."

"So, if we had an invention far ahead of their latest stuff, they might want the secret badly enough to make a deal. See?"

"How can we? We're not inventive here. No gentleman would lower himself by tinkering with machines while the common people lack the wit."

Borel smiled. "Suppose I had such a secret?"

"That would be different. What is it?"

"It's an idea that was confided to me by a dying old man. Although the Earthmen had scorned him and said his device was against the laws of nature, it worked. I know because he showed me a model."

"But what is it?" cried Kubanan.

"It would not only be of vast value to the Earthmen, but also would make Mikardand preeminent among the nations of Krishna."

"Torture us not, Sir Felix!" pleaded Zerdai.

"It's a perpetual-motion machine."

Kubanan asked: "What's that?"

"A machine that runs forever, or at least until it wears out."

KUBANAN frowned and twitched his antennae. "Not sure am I that I understand you. We have water-wheels for operating grain-mills which run until they wear out."

"Not quite what I mean." Borel concentrated on putting a scientific concept into words, a hard thing to do because he neither knew nor cared much about such matters. "I mean, this machine will give out more power than is put into it."

"Wherein lies the advantage of that?"

"Why, Earthmen prize power above all things. Power runs their space-ships and motor-vehicles, their communications equipment and factories. Power lights their homes and milks their cows... I forget, you don't know about cows. And where do they get their power? From coal, uranium, and things like that. Minerals. They get some from the sun and the tides, but not enough, and they worry about exhaustion of their minerals. Now, my device takes power from the force of gravity, which is the very fundamental quality of matter." He was striding up and down in his eagerness. "Sooner or later Krishna is bound to have a scientific revolution like that of Earth. Neither you nor the *Viagens*

Interplanetarias can hold it off forever. And when—”

“I hope I live not to see it,” said Kubanan.

“When it comes, don’t you want Mikardand to lead the planet? Of course! No need to give up your social system. In fact, if we organize the thing right, it’ll not only secure the rule of the Order in Mikardand, but extend the Order’s influence over all Krishna!”

Kubanan was beginning to catch a little of Borel’s fire. “How propose you to do that?”

“Ever heard of a corporation?”

“Let me think—is that not some vulgar scheme Earthmen use in trade and manufacture?”

“Yes, but there’s more to it than that. There’s no limit to what you can do with a corporation. The *Viagens* is a corporation, though all its stock is owned by governments...” Borel plunged into corporation finance, not neglecting to say: “Of course, the promoter of a corporation gets fifty-one percent of the stock in consideration of his services.”

“Who would the promoter be in our case?”

“I, naturally. We can form this corporation to finance the machine. The initial financing can come from the Order itself, and later the members can either hold—”

“Wait, wait. How can the members buy stock when they own no money of their own?”

“Unh. That’s a tough one. I guess the treasury’ll have to keep the stock; it can either draw profits from the lease of the machines, or sell the stock at an enormous profit—”

“Sir Felix,” said Kubanan, “You make my head to spin. No more, lest my head split like a melon on the chopping-block. Enticing though your scheme be, there is one immovable obstacle.”

“Yes?”

“The Grand Master and the other officers would never permit—you’ll not take offense?—would never permit an outsider such as yourself to acquire such power over the Order. ‘Twas all I could do to put over

your lottery scheme, and this would be one thing too many, like a second nose on your face.”

“All right, think it over,” said Borel. “Now suppose you tell me about the Order of Qarar.”

Kubanan obliged with an account of the heroic deeds of Qarar, the legendary founder of the Order who had slain assorted giants and monsters. As he talked, Borel reflected on his position. He doubted if the Qararuma would want to take in a being from another planet like himself, and even if they did, the club rules against private property would handicap his style.

He asked: “How do Mikardanders become members? By being—uh—hatched in the official incubator?”

“Not always. Each child from the incubator is tested at various times during its growth. If it fail any test, ‘tis let out for adoption by some good commoner family. On the other hand, when membership falls low, we watch the children of commoners and any that show exceptional qualities are admitted to training as wards of the Order.” The treasurer went on to tell of the various grades of membership until he got sleepy and took his leave.

* * *

Later Borel asked Zerdai: “Love me?”

“You know I do, my lord!”

“Then I have a job for you.”

“Aught you say, dearest master.”

“I want one of those honorary memberships.”

“But Felix, that’s for notables like the King of Gozashtand only! I know not what I could accomplish—”

“You make the suggestion to Kubanan, see? And keep needling him until he asks me. He trusts you.”

“I will try, my dearest. And I hope Shurgez never returns.”

While ordinarily Borel would have investigated this last cryptic remark, at the moment his head was too full of schemes for self-aggrandizement. “Another thing. Who’s the most skilled metal-worker in Mishe? I want somebody who can make a working model that really works.”

“I’ll find out for you, my knight.”

ZERDAI SENT Borel to one Henjare bad-Qavao the Brazer, a gnomish Mikardandu whom Borel first dazzled with his facade and then swore to secrecy with dreadful-sounding oaths of his own invention.

He then presented the craftsman with a rough plan for a wheel with a lot of rods with weights on their ends, pivoted to the circumference so that they had some freedom to swing in the plane of rotation of the wheel. There was also a trip arrangement so that as the wheel rotated, each rod as it approached the top was moved from a position leaning back against a stop on the rim to a straight-out radial position. Hence the thing looked as though at any time the weights on one side stood out farther from the center than those on the other, and therefore would over-balance the latter and cause the wheel to turn indefinitely.

Borel knew just enough about science to realize that the device would not work, though not enough to know why. On the other hand, since these gloops knew even less than he did, there should be no trouble in selling them the idea.

That night Kubanan said: "Sir Felix, a brilliant thought has struck me. Won't you accept an honorary membership in our proud Order? In truth, you'll find it a great advantage while you dwell in Mikardand, or even when you journey elsewhere."

Borel registered surprise. "Me? I'm most humbly grateful, excellency, but is an outsider like myself worthy of such an honor?" Meanwhile he thought: *good old Zerdai! If I were the marrying kind...* For a moment he wavered in his determination to shake her when she'd served her turn.

"Nonsense, my lad, of course you're worthy. I'd have gone farther and proposed you for full membership, but the Council pointed out that the constitution allows that only to native-born Mikardanders of our own species. As 'tis, honorary membership will provide you with most

of the privileges of membership and few of the obligations."

"I'm overcome with happiness."

"Of course there's the little matter of the initiation."

"What?" Borel controlled his face.

"Yes; waive it they would not, since no king are you. It amounts to little; much ceremony and a night's vigil. I'll coach you in the ritual. And you must obtain ceremonial robes; I'll make you a list."

Borel wished he'd hiked the printing charges on the lottery material by another fifty percent.

THE INITIATION proved not only expensive, but an interplanetary bore as well. Brothiers in fantastic robes and weird masks stood about muttering a mystic chant at intervals. Borel stood in front of the Grand Master of the Order, a tall Krishnan with a lined face that might have been carved from wood for all the expression it bore. Borel responded to interminable questions; since the language was an archaic dialect of Gozashtandou, he did not really know what he was saying half the time. He was lectured on the Order's glorious past, mighty present, and boundless future, and on his duties to protect and defend his interests. He called down all sorts of elaborate astrological misfortunes on his head should he violate his oaths.

"Now," said the grand master, "art thou ready for the vigil. Therefore I command thee: strip to thy underwear!"

Wondering what he was getting into now, Borel did so.

"Come with me," said Grand Master Sir Djuvain.

They led him down stairs and through passages that got progressively narrower, darker, and less pleasant. A couple of the hooded brethren carried lanterns, which soon became necessary in order to see the way. *We must be far below the ground-level of the citadel*, thought Borel, stumbling along in his socks and feeling most clammy and uncomfortable.

When they seemed to have descended into the very bowels of the

Earth they halted. The grand master said: "Here shalt thou remain the night, O aspirant. Danger will come upon thee, and beware how thou meetest it."

One of the brothers was measuring a long candle. He cut it off at a certain length and fixed it upright to a small shelf in the rough side of the tunnel. Another brother handed Borel a hunting-spear with a long, broad head.

Then they left him.

So far he had carried off his act by assuring himself that all this was a lot of bluff and hokum. Nothing serious could be intended. As the brothers' footfalls died away, however, he was no longer so sure. The damned candle seemed to illuminate for a distance of only about a metre in all directions. Fore and aft the tunnel receded into utter blackness.

His hair rose as something rustled. As he whipped the spear into position it scuttled away; some rat-like creature no doubt. Borel started pacing. If that damned dope Abreu had only let him bring his watch! Then he'd at least have a notion of the passage of time. It seemed he'd been pacing for hours, though that was probably an illusion.

BOREL BECAME aware of an odd irregularity in the floor beneath his stockinginged feet, and he bent down and explored it with his fingers. Yes, a pair of parallel grooves, two or three centimetres deep, ran lengthwise along the tunnel. He followed them a few steps each way, but stopped when he could no longer see what he was doing. Why should there be two parallel grooves like a track along the floor?

He paced until his legs ached from weariness, then tried sitting on the floor with his back against the wall. When he soon found his eyelids drooping, he scrambled up lest his initiators return to find him asleep. The candle burned slowly down, its flame standing perfectly still for minutes at a stretch and then wavering slightly as some tiny air-current brushed it. Still silence and darkness.

The candle would soon be burned down to nothing. What then? Would they expect him to stand here in complete darkness?

A sound made him jump violently. He could not tell what sort of sound it was; merely a faint noise from down the tunnel. There it came again.

Then his hair really rose at a low throaty vocal noise, the kind one hears in the carnivore-cage of the zoo before feeding-time. A sort of grunt, such as a big cat makes in tuning up for a real roar. It came again, louder.

The dying candle-flame showed to Borel's horrified gaze something moving fast towards him in the tunnel. With a frightful roar a great yeki rushed into the dim light with gleaming eyes and bared fangs.

For perhaps a second (though it seemed an hour) Felix Borel stood helplessly holding his spear poised, his mouth hanging open. In that second, however, his mind suddenly worked with the speed of a tripped mousetrap. Something odd about the yeki's motion, together with the fact of the grooves in the floor, gave him the answer: the animal was a stuffed one pushed towards him on wheels.

Borel bent and laid his spear diagonally across the floor of the tunnel, and stepped back. When the contraption struck the spear it slewed sideways with a bang, rattle, and thump and stopped, its nose against the wall.

Borel recovered his spear and examined the derailed yeki at close range. It proved a pretty battered-looking piece of taxidermy, the head and neck criss-crossed with seams where the hide had been slashed open and sewn up again. Evidently it had been used for initiations for a long time, and some of the aspirants had speared it. Others had doubtless turned tail and run, thus flunking the test.

Footsteps sounded in the corridor and lanterns bobbed closer just as the candle on the shelf guttered out. The grand master and the masked bretheren swarmed around Borel, in-

cluding one with a horn on which he had made the yeki-noises. They slapped him on the back and told him how brave he was, then led him back up many flights to the main hall, where he was allowed to don his clothes again. The grand master hung a jewelled dragon insignia around his neck and welcomed him with a florid speech in archaic style:

"O Felix, be thou hereby accepted into this most noble, most ancient, most honorable, most secret, most puissant, most righteous, most chivalrous, and most fraternal Order, and upon thee be bestowed all the rights, privileges, rank, standing, immunities, duties, liabilities, obligations, and attributes of a knight of this most noble, most ancient, most honorable..."

The long Krishnan night was two-thirds gone when the hand-shaking and drinking were over. Borel and Kubanan, arms about each other's necks, wove their way drunkenly to the latter's apartment while Borel sang what he could remember of an Earthly song about a King of England and a queen of Spain, until Kubanan shushed him, saying: "Know you not that poetry's forbidden in Midardand?"

"I didn't know. Why?"

"The Order decided it was bad for our—*hic*—martial spirit. B'sides, poets tell too damned many lies. What's the nex' stanza?"

4

NEXT MORNING Sir Felix, as he tried to remember to think of himself, began to press for consideration of his perpetual-motion scheme. He obtained an interview with Grand Master Djuvain in the afternoon and put his proposal. Sir Djuvain seemed puzzled by the whole thing and Borel had to call in Kubanan to help him explain.

Djuvain finally said: "Very well, Brother Felix, tell me when your preparations are ready and I'll call a general meeting of the members in residence to pass upon your proposal."

Then, since the working model was

not yet ready, Borel had nothing to do for a couple of days except breathe down the neck of Henjare the Brazer and superintend the building of the lottery ticket-booth. The printing-job was nowhere near done.

Therefore he whistled up Yerevats to help him pass the time by practicing driving the buggy. After a couple of hours he could fairly well manage the difficult art of backing and filling to turn around in a restricted space.

"Have the carriage ready right after lunch," he ordered.

"Master go ride?"

"Yes. I shan't need you though; I'm taking it myself."

"Unk. No Good. Master get in trouble."

"That's my lookout."

"Bet master take girl out. Bad business."

"Mind your own business!" shouted Borel, and made a pass at Yerevats, who ducked and scuttled out. Now, thought Borel, *Yerevats, will sulk and I'll have to spend a day cajoling him back into a good humor or I'll get no decent service.* Damn it, why didn't they have mechanical servants with no feelings that their masters had to take into account? Somebody had tried to make one on Earth, but the thing had run amok and mistaken its master for a cord of firewood...

THE AFTERNOON saw him trotting down the main avenue of Mishe with Zerdai by his side looking at him worshipfully. He could not get quite used to the curious sound made by the six hooves of the aya when it trotted.

He asked: "Who has the right of way if somebody comes in from the side?"

"Why, you do, Felix! You're a member of the Order, even if not a regular Guardian!"

"Oh." Borel, though he had about as little public spirit as a man can have, had been exposed to the democratic institutions of Earth long enough so as to find these class distinctions distasteful. "In other

words, because I'm now an honorary knight, I can tear through the town at full gallop hollering '*byant-hao!*' and if anybody gets run over that's too bad?"

"Naturally. What think you? But I forget you're from another world. 'Tis one of your fascinations that beneath your hard adventuresome exterior you're more gentle and considerate than the men of this land."

Borel hid a smile. He'd been called a lot of things before, including thief, swindler, and slimy double-crossing heel, but never gentle and considerate. Maybe that was an example of the relativity the long-haired scientists talked about.

"Where would you like me to drive you?" he asked.

"To Earth!" she said, putting her head on his shoulder. For a moment he was almost tempted to renege on his plan to leave her behind. Then the resolute selfishness that was the adventurer's leading trait came to his rescue, and he reminded himself that on a fast getaway, the less baggage the better. Love 'em and leave 'em. Anyway, wouldn't she be happier if they parted before she learned he was no do-gooder after all?

"Let's to the tournament ground outside the North Gate. Today's the battle betwixt Sir Volhadj and Sir Shusp."

"What's this? I hadn't heard of it."

"Sir Shusp forced a challenge of Sir Volhadj; some quarrel over the love of a lady. Shusp had already slain three knights in affrays of this kind."

Borel said: "If you Guardians are supposed to have everything in common like the communists we used to have on Earth, I don't see what call a knight has to get jealous. Couldn't they both court her at once?"

"That's not the custom. A maid should dismiss the one before taking another; to do otherwise were in bad taste."

They reached the North Gate and ambled out into the country. Borel asked: "Where does this road go?"

"Know you not? To Koloft and Novorecife."

Beyond the last houses, where the

farmed fields began, the tournament grounds lay to the right of the road. It reminded Borel of a North American high-school football field: same small wooden grandstands, and tents at the ends where the goal-posts should be. In the middle of one stand a section had been built out into a box in which sat the high officers of the Order. Hawkers circulated through the crowd, one crying: "Flowers! Flowers! Buy a flower with the color of your favorite knight! Red for Volhadj, white for Shusp. Flowers!"

The stands were already full of people who, from the predominant color of the flowers in their hats, seemed to favor Shusp. Borel ignored Zerdai's suggestion that he pitch some commoner out of his seat and claim it for himself, and led her to where the late arrivals clustered standing at one end of the field. He was a little annoyed with himself for not having come in time to lay a few bets. This should be much more exciting than the ponies on Earth, and by shaving the odds and betting both ways he might put himself in the enviable position of making a profit on these saps no matter who won.

AS THEY took their places a trumpet blew. Nearby, Borel saw a man in Moorish-looking armor, wearing a spiked helmet with a nose-guard and a little skirt of chain-mail; he was sitting on a big tough-looking aya, also wearing bits of armor here and there. This Qararu now left his tent to trot down to the middle of the field. From the red touches about his saddle and equipment Borel judged him to be Sir Volhadj. Volhadj as the challenged party had his sympathy, in line with his own distaste for violence. Why couldn't the other gloop be a good fellow about his girl friend? Borel had done that sort of thing and found nobody the worse for it.

From the other end of the field came another rider, similarly equipped but decorated in white. The two met at the center of the field, wheeled to face the grand master,

and walked their mounts forward until they were as close as they could get to the booth. The grand master made a speech which Borel could not hear, and then the knights wheeled away and trotted back to their respective ends of the field. At the near end Sir Volhadj's squires, or seconds, or whatever they were, handed him up a lance and a smallish round shield.

The trumpet blew again and the antagonists galloped towards each other. Borel winced as they met with a crash in the middle of the field. When Borel opened his eyes again, he saw that the red knight had been knocked out of the saddle and was rolling over and over on the moss. His aya continued on without him, while the white knight slowed gradually as he approached Borel's end of the field, then turned and headed back.

Volhadj had meanwhile gotten up with a visible effort in his weight of iron and clanked over to where his lance lay. He picked it up, and as Shusp bore down on him he planted the butt-end in the ground and lowered the point to the level of the charging aya's chest, where the creature's light armor did not protect it. Borel could not see the spear go in, but he judged that it had when the beast reared, screamed, threw its rider, and collapsed kicking. Borel, who felt strongly about cruelty to animals, thought indignantly that there ought to be an interplanetary S. P. C. A. to stop this sort of thing.

At this point the crowd began to jostle and push with cries of excitement, so Borel had to take his eyes off the fight long enough to clear a space with his elbows for Zerdai. When he looked back again the knights were at it on foot, making a tremendous din, Shusp with a huge two-handed sword, Vohadj with his buckler and a sword of more normal size.

They circled around one another, slashing, thrusting, and parrying, and worked their way slowly down to Borel's end of the field, till he could see the dents in their armor and the trickle of blood running down the chin of Sir Volhadj. By

now, both were so winded that the fight was going as slowly as an honest wrestling-match, with both making a few swipes and then stopping to pant and glare at each other for a while.

Then in the midst of an exchange of strokes, Sir Volhadj's sword flew up, turning over and over until it came down at Shusp's feet. Sir Shusp instantly put a foot on it and forced Sir Volhadj back with a swing of his crowbar-like blade. Then he picked up the dropped sword and threw it as far away as he could.

Borel asked: "Hey, is he allowed to do that?"

"I know not," said Zerdai. "Though there be few rules, mayhap that's against them."

Shusp now advanced rapidly on Volhadj, who was reduced to a shield battered all out of shape and a dagger. The latter gave ground, parrying the swipes as best he could.

"Why doesn't the fool cut and run?" asked Borel.

Zerdai stared at him. "Know you not that for a knight of the Order the penalty for cowardice is flaying alive?"

At the rate, Volhadj was backing towards them he'd soon be treading on the toes of the spectators, who in fact began to spread out nervously. Volhadj was staggering, disheartening Borel, who hated to see his favorite nearing his rope's end.

ON A SUDDEN impulse, Borel drew his own sword and called: "Hey, Volhadj, don't look now but here's something for you!" With that he threw the sword as if it had been a javelin, so that the point stuck into the ground alongside of Volhadj. The latter dropped his dagger, snatched up the sword, and tore into Shusp with renewed vigor.

Then Shusp went down with a clang. Vohadj, standing over him, found a gap in his armor around the throat, put the point there, and pushed down on the hilt with both hands... When Borel opened his eyes again, Shusp's legs were giving their last twitch. Cheers and the paying of bets.

Volhadj came back to where Borel stood and said: "Sir Felix the Red, I perceive you succored me but now."

"How d'you know that?"

"By your empty scabbard, friend. Here, take your sword with my thanks. I doubt the referee will hold your deed a foul, since the chief complainant will no longer be present to press his case. Call on me for help any time." He shook hands warmly and walked wearily off to his wigwam.

"'Twas a brave deed, Felix," said Zerdai, squeezing his arm as they walked back to the buggy through the departing crowd.

"I don't see that it was anything special," said Borel truthfully.

"Why, had Sir Shusp won, he'd have challenged you!"

"*Gluk!*" said Borel. He hadn't thought of that.

"What is it, my dearest?"

"Something caught in my throat. Let's get back to dinner ahead of the crowd, huh? Giddap, Galahad!"

However, Zerdai retired after dinner, saying she would not be back for supper; the excitement had given her a headache.

Kubanan said: "'Tis a rare thing, for she's been in better spirits since your arrival than was her wont since Sir Shurgez departed."

"You mean she was grieving for a boy-friend until I came along and cheered her up?" Borel thought, *Kubanan's a nice old wump; too bad he'll have to be the fall guy for the project. But business is business.*

"Yes. Ah, Felix, it's sad you're of another species, so that she'll never lay you an egg! For the Order can use offspring inheriting your qualities. Even I, sentimental old fool that I am, like to think of you as a son-in-law and Zerdai's eggs as my own grandchildren, as though I were some simple commoner with a family."

Borel asked: "What's this about Shurgez? What happened to him?"

"The grand master ordered him on a quest."

"What quest?"

"To fetch the beard of the King of Balhib."

"And what does the Order want with this king's beard? Are you going into the upholstery business?"

Kubanan laughed. "Of course not. The King of Balhib has treated the Order with scorn and contumely of late, and we thought to teach him a lesson."

"And why was Shurgez sent?"

"Because of his foul murder of Brother Sir Zamran."

"Why did he murder Zamran?"

"Surely you know the tale—but I forget, you're still new here. Sir Zamran was he who slew Shurgez's lady."

"I thought Zerdai was Shurgez's girl."

"She was, but afterward. Let me begin at the beginning. Time was when Sir Zamran and the Lady Fevzi were lovers, all right and decorous in accord with the customs of the Order. Then for some reason Lady Fevzi cast off Zamran, as she had every right to do, and took Sir Shurgez in his stead. This made Sir Zamran wroth, and instead of taking his defeat philosophically like a true knight, what does he do but come up behind Lady Fevzi at the ball celebrating the conjunction of the planets Vishnu and Ganesha, and smite off her head just as she was presenting a home-made pie to the grand master!"

"Wow!" said Borel with an honest shudder.

"True, 'twas no knightly deed, especially in front of the grand master, not to mention the difficulty of cleansing the carpet. If he had to slay her he should at least have taken her outside. The grand master, most annoyed, would have rebuked Zamran severely for his discourtesy, but he's hardly past the preamble when Sir Shurgez comes in to ask after his sweetling, sees the scene, and leaps upon Zamran with his dagger before any can stay him. So then we have two spots on the rug to clean and the grand master in a

fair fury. The upshot was that he ordered Shurgez on this quest to teach him to issue his challenges in due form and not go thrusting knives among the ribs of any who incur his displeasure. No doubt he half hoped that Shurgez would be slain in the doing, for the King of Balhib is no effeminate."

Borel was sure now that nothing would ever induce him to settle permanently among such violent people. "When did Shurgez get time to—uh—be friends with Zerdai?"

"Why, he couldn't leave before the astrological indications were favorable, to wit for twenty-one days, and during that time he enjoyed my secretary's favor. Far places have ever attracted her, and I think she'd have gone with him if he'd have had her."

"What's the word about Shurgez now?"

"The simplest word of all, to wit: no word. Should he return, my spies will tell me of his approach before he arrives."

Borel became aware that the clicking sound that had puzzled him was the chatter of his own teeth. He resolved to ride herd on Henjare the next day to rush the model through to completion.

"One more question," he said. "Whatever became of Lady Fevzi's pie?" Kubanan could not tell him that, however.

THIS MODEL was in fact well enough so that Borel asked the grand master for the perpetual-motion meeting the following day. Although he expected an evening meeting, with all the knights full of dinner and feeling friendly, it turned out that the only time available on the grand master's schedule was in the morning.

"Of course, Brother Felix," said Sir Djuvain, "if you prefer to put it off a few days..."

"No, most mighty potentate," said Borel, thinking of the Shurgez menace. "The sooner the better for you, me, and the Order."

Thus it happened that the next morning, after breakfast, Felix Borel found himself on the platform of the

main auditorium of the citadel, facing several thousand knights of the Order of Qarar. Beside him on a small table stood his gleaming new brass model of the perpetual-motion wheel. A feature of the wheel not obvious to the audience was a little pulley on the shaft, around which was wound a fine but strong thread made of hairs from the tails of shomals, which led from the wheel off into the wings where Zerdai stood hidden from view. It had taken all Borel's blandishments to get her to play this role.

He launched into his speech: "...what is the purpose and function of our noble Order? Power! And what is the basis of power? First, our own strong right arms; second, the wealth of the Order, which in turn is derived from the wealth of the commons. So anything that enriches the commons increases our power, does it not? Let me give you an example. There's a railroad, I hear, from Madjbur to Djazmuran along the coast, worked by bishtars pulling little strings of cars. Now, mount one of my wheels on a car and connect it by a belt or chain to the wheels. Start the wheel revolving, and what happens? The car with its wheel will pull far more cars than a bishtar, and likewise it never grows old and dies as an animal does, never runs amok and smashes property, and when not in use stands quietly in its shed without needing to be fed. We could build a railroad from Mishe to Madjbur and another from Mishe to Djazmuran, and carry goods faster between the coastal cities than it is now carried by the direct route. There's a source of infinite wealth, of which the Order would of course secure its due share.

"Then there is the matter of weapons. I cannot go into details because many of these are confidential, but I have positive assurance that there are those who would trade the mighty weapons of the Interplanetary Council for the secret of this little wheel. You know what that would mean. Think it over.

"Now I will show you how it ac-

tually works. This model you see is not a true working wheel, but a mere toy, an imitation to give you an idea of the finished wheel, which would be much larger. This little wheel will not give enough power to be very useful. Why? Friction. The mysterious sciences of my native planet found centuries ago that friction is proportionately larger in small machines than in large ones. Therefore the fact that this little wheel won't give useful power is proof that a larger one would. However, the little wheel still gives enough power to run itself without outside help.

"Are you watching, brothers? Observe: I release the brake that prevents the wheel from turning. Hold your breaths, sirs—ah, it moves! It turns! The secret of the ages comes to life before you!"

HE HAD signalled Zerdai, who had begun to pull on the thread, reeling in one end of it while paying out the other. The wheel turned slowly, the little brass legs going click-click-click as they reached the trip at the top.

"Behold!" yelled Borel. "It works! The Order is all-rich and all-powerful!"

After letting the wheel spin for a minute or so, Borel resumed: "Brothers, what must we do to realize on this wonderful invention? One, we need funds to build a number of large wheels to try out various applications: to power ships and rail-cars, to run grist-mills, and to turn the shafts of machines in workshops. No machine is ever perfect when first completed; there are always details to be improved. Second, we need an organization to exploit the wheel: to make treaties with other states to lease wheels from us and to give us the exclusive right to exploit wheels within their borders; and to negotiate with the powers that be to exchange the secret of the wheel for—I need go no further!

"On Earth we have a type of organization called a corporation for such purposes..." And he launched

into the account he had previously given Kubanan and Djuvain.

"Now," he said, "what do we need for this corporation? The officers of the Order and I have agreed that to start, the treasury shall advance the sum of 245,000 *karda*, for which the Order shall receive forty-nine percent of the stock of the company. The remaining fifty-one percent will naturally remain with the promoter and director of the company; that's the arrangement we've found most successful on Earth. However, before such a large sum can be invested in this great enterprise, we must in accordance with the constitution let you vote on the question. First I had better stop our little wheel here, lest the noise distract you."

The clicking stopped as Borel put his hand against the wheel. Zerdai broke the thread with a quick jerk, gathered it all in, and slipped away from her hiding-place.

Borel continued: "I therefore turn the meeting back to our friend, guide, counsellor, and leader, Grand Master Sir Djuvain."

The Grand Master put the vote, and the appropriation passed by a large majority. As the knights cheered, Kubanan led a line of pages staggering under bags of coins to the stage, where the bags were ranged in a row on the boards.

Borel, when he could get silence again, said: "I thank you one and all. If any would care to examine my little wheel, they shall see for themselves that no trickery is involved."

The *Garma Qararuma* climbed up en masse to congratulate Borel. The adventurer, trying not to seem to gloat over the money, was telling himself that once he got away with this bit of swag he'd sell it for World Federation dollars, go back to Earth, invest his fortune conservatively, and never have to worry about money again. Of course he'd promised himself the same thing on several previous occasions, but somehow the money always seemed to dissipate before he got around to investing it.

5

SIR VOLHADJ was pushing through the crowd, saying: "Sir Felix, may I speak to you aside?"

"Sure. What is it?"

"How feel you?"

"Fine. Never better."

"That's good, for Shurgez has returned to Mishe with his mission accomplished."

"What's that?" said Kubanan. "Shurgez back, and my spies haven't told me?"

"Right, my lord."

"Oh-oh," said the treasurer. "If he challenges you, Sir Felix, you will, as a knight, have to give him instant satisfaction. What arms own you besides that sword?"

"Gluk," said Borel. "N-none. Doesn't the challenge party have a choice of weapons?" he asked with some vague idea of specifying boxing-gloves.

"According to the rules of the Order," said Volhadj, "each fighter may use what weapons he pleases. Shurgez will indubitably employ the full panoply: lance, sword, and a mace or ax in reserve, and will enter the lists in full armor. As for you—well, since you and I are much of a size, feel free to borrow aught that you need."

Before Borel could say anything more, a murmur and a head-turning apprised him of the approach of some interest. As the crowd parted, a squat, immensely muscular, and very Mongoloid-looking knight came forward. "Are you he whom they call Sir Felix the Red?" asked the newcomer.

"Y-yes," said Borel, icicles of fear running through his viscera.

"I am Sir Shurgez. It has been revealed to me that in my absence you've taken the Lady Zerdai as your companion. Therefore I name you a vile traitor, scurvy knave, villainous rascal, base mechanic, and foul foreigner, and shall be at the tournament-grounds immediately after lunch to prove my assertions upon your diseased and ugly body.

Here, you thing of no account!" And Sir Shurgez, who had been peeling off his glove, threw it lightly in Borel's face.

"I'll fight you!" shouted Borel in a sudden surge of temper. "*Baghan! Zeft!*" He added a few more Gozashtandou obscenities and threw the glove back at Shurgez, who caught it, laughed shortly, and turned his back.

"That's that," said Kubanan as Shurgez marched off. "Sure am I that so bold and experienced a knight as yourself will make mincemeat of yon braggart. Shall I have my pages convey the gold to your chamber while we lunch?"

Borel felt like saying: "I don't want any lunch," but judged it impolitic. His wits, after the first moment of terror-stricken paralysis, had begun to work again. First he felt sorry for himself. What had he done to deserve this? Why had he joined this crummy club, where instead of swindling each other like gentlemen the members settled differences by the cruel and barbarous methods of physical combat? All he'd done was to keep Zerdai happy while this blug was away...

Then he pulled himself together and tried to think his way out of the predicament. Should he simply refuse to fight? That meant skinning alive. Could he sprain an ankle? Maybe, but with all these people standing around... Why hadn't he told that well-meaning sap Volhadj that he was sick unto death?

And now how could he get away with the gold? It was probably too heavy for the buggy; he'd need a big two-aya carriage, which couldn't be obtained in a matter of minutes. How could he make his getaway at all before the fight? With his dear damned friends clustering round...

They were filling him with good advice: "I knew a man who'd begin a charge with lance level, then whirl it around his head as 'twere a club..." "When, Sir Vardao slew that wight from Gozashtand, he dropped his lance altogether and snatched his mace..." "If you can get him around the neck with one

arm, go for his crotch with your dagger..."

What he really wanted was advice on how to sneak out of the acropolis and make tracks for Novorecife with a third of the Order's treasury. When he had gulped the last tasteless morsel, he said: "Good sirs, please excuse me. I have things to say to those near to me."

ZERDAI was crying on her bed. He picked her up and kissed her. She responded avidly; this was an Earthly custom on which the Krishnans had eagerly seized.

"Come," he said, "it's not that bad."

She clung to him frantically. "But I love only you! I couldn't live without you! And I've been counting so on going with you to far planets..."

Borel's vestigial conscience stirred, and in a rare burst of frankness he said: "Look, Zerdai, it'll be small loss no matter how the fight comes out. I'm not the shining hero you think I am; in fact some people consider me an unmitigated heel."

"No! No! You're kind and good..."

"...and even if I get through this alive I may have to run for it without you."

"I'll die! I could never companion with that brute Shurgez again..."

Borel thought of giving her some of the gold, since he couldn't hope to get it all away himself. But then with the Guardians' communistic principles she couldn't keep it, and the Order would seize all he left in any case. Finally he unpinned several of his more glittery decorations and handed them to her, saying:

"At least you'll have these to remember me by." That seemed to break her down completely.

He found Yerevats in his own room and said: "If the fight doesn't go my way, take as much of this gold as you can carry, and the buggy, and get out of town fast."

"Oh, wonderful master must win fight!"

"That's as the stars decide. Hope for the best but expect the worse."

"But master, how shall pull buggy?"

"Keep the aya too. Volhadj is lending me his oversized one for the scrap. Tell you what: when we go out to the field, bring one of those bags inside your clothes."

AN HOUR later Yerevats buckled the last strap of Borel's borrowed harness. The suit was a composite, chain-mail over the joints and plate-armor elsewhere. Borel found that it hampered him less than he expected, considering how heavy it had seemed when he hefted before putting it on.

He stepped out of the tent at his end of the field, where Volhadj was holding the big aya, which turned and looked at him suspiciously from under its horns. At the far end Shurgez already sat his mount. Borel, though outwardly calm, was reviling himself for not having thought of this and that: he should have hinted that his weapon would be a gun; he should have bought a bishtar and sat high up on its elephantine back, out of reach of Shurgez, while he potted his enemy with his crossbow...

Yerevats, bustling about the animal's saddle, secured the bag he had brought with him. Although he tried to do so secretly, the jingle of coins attracted the attention of Volhadj, who asked: "A bag of gold on your saddle? Why do you that, friend?"

"Luck," said Borel, feeling for the stirrup. His first effort to swing his leg over his mount failed because of the extra weight he was carrying, and they had to give him a boost. Yerevats handed him up his spiked helmet, which he carefully wiggled down onto his head. At once the outside noises acquired a muffled quality as the sound was filtered through the steel and the padding. Borel buckled his chinstrap.

A horn blew. As he had seen the other knights do the day of the previous battle, Borel kicked the animal

into motion and rode slowly down the field towards his opponent, who advanced to meet him. Thank the Lord he knew how to ride an Earthly horse! This was not much different save that the fact that the saddle was directly over the aya's intermediate pair of legs caused its rider to be jarred unpleasantly in the trot.

Borel could hardly recognize Shurgez behind the nasal of his helmet, and he supposed that his own features were equally hidden. Without a word they wheeled towards the side of the field where the grand master sat in his booth. They walked their animals over to the stand and listened side by side while Sir Djuvain droned the rules of the contest at them. Borel thought it an awful lot of words to say that, for all practical purposes, anything went.

Beside the grand master sat Kuanan, stony-faced except at the last, when he tipped Borel a wink. Borel also caught a glimpse of Zerdai in the stands; catching his eye, she waved frantically.

The grand master finished and made motions with his baton. The fighters wheeled away from each other and trotted back to their respective tents, where Volhadj handed Borel his lance and buckler, saying: "Hold your shaft level; watch his..." Borel, preoccupied, heard none of it.

"Get you ready," said Volhadj. The trumpet blew.

Borel, almost bursting with excitement, said: "Good-bye, and thanks."

THE HOOVES of Shurgez's mount were already drumming on the moss before Borel collected his wits enough to put his own beast into motion. For a long time, it seemed, he rode towards a little figure on aya-back that got no nearer. Then all at once the aya and its rider expanded to life-size and Borel's foe was upon him.

Since Shurgez had started sooner and ridden harder, they met short of

the mid-point of the field. As his enemy bore down, Borel rose in his stirrups and threw his lance at Shurgez, then instantly hauled on the reins braided into the aya's mustache to guide it to the right.

Shurgez ducked as the lance hurtled toward him, so that the point of his own lance wavered and missed Borel by a metre. Borel heard the thrown spear hit sideways with a clank against Shurgez's armor. Then he was past and headed for Shurgez's tent at the far end. He leaned forward and spurred his aya mercilessly.

Just before he reached the end of the field he jerked a look back. Shurgez was still reining in to turn his mount. Borel switched his attention back to where he was going and aimed for a gap on one side of Shurgez's tent. The people around the tent stood staring until the last minute, then frantically dove out of the way as the aya thundered through. Yells rose behind.

Borel guided his beast over to the main road towards Novorecife, secured the reins to the projection on the front of the saddle, and began shedding impedimenta. Off went the pretty damascened helmet, to fall with a clank to the roadway. Away went sword and battle-ax. After some fumbling he got rid of the brases on his forearms and their attached gauntlets, and when the cuirass with its little chain sleeves. The iron pants would have to await a better opportunity.

The aya kept on at a dead run until Mishe dwindled in the distance. When the beast began to puff alarmingly, Borel let it slow to a walk for a while. However, when he looked back he thought he saw little dots on the road that might be pursuers, and spurred his mount to a gallop once more. When the dots disappeared he slowed again. Gallop—trot—walk—trot—gallop—that was how you covered long distances on a horse, so it should work on this six-legged equivalent. O for a nice shiny Packard! After this he'd confine his effort to Earth, where at least you knew the score.

He looked scornfully down at the bag of gold clinking faintly at the side of his saddle. One bag was all he had dared to take for fear of slowing his mount. It was not a bad haul for small-time stuff, and would let him live and travel long enough to case his next set of suckers. Still, it was nothing compared to what he'd have made if the damned Shurgez hadn't popped up so inopportunistly. If, now, he'd been able to get away with the proceeds both of the stock sale and of the lottery...

NEXT MORNING found Borel still on the aya's back, plodding over the causeway through the Koloft Swamps. Flying things buzzed and bit; bubbles of stinking gas rose through the black water and burst. Now and then some sluggish swamp-dwelling creature roiled the surface or grunted a mating-call. A shower had soaked Borel during the night, and in this dank atmosphere his clothes seemed never to dry.

With yelping cries, the tailed men of Koloft broke from the bushes and ran towards him: Yerevats's wild brethren with stone-bladed knives and spears, hairy, naked, and fearful-looking. Borel spurred the aya into a shambling trot. The tailed men scrambled to the causeway just too late to seize him; a thrown spear went past his head with a swish.

Borel threw away his kindness-to-animals principle and dug spurs into the aya's flanks. They pounded after him. In fact by squirming around he could see that they were actually gaining on him. Another spear came whistling along. Borel flinched, and the spear-head struck the cantle of his saddle and broke, leaving a sliver of obsidian sticking into the saddle as the shaft clattered to the causeway. The next one, he thought gloomily, would be a hit.

Then inspiration seized him. If he could get his money-bag open and throw a handful of gold to the roadway, these savages might stop to scramble for it. His fingers tore at Yerevats's lashings.

And then the twenty-kilo weight of

the gold snatched the whole bag from his grasp. Clank! Gold pieces spilled out of the open mouth of the sack and rolled in little circles on the causeway. The tailed men whooped and pounced on them, abandoning their chase. While Borel was glad not to have to dodge any more spears, he did think the price a little steep. However, to go back to dispute possession of the money now would be merely a messy form of suicide, so he rode wearily on.

He reeled into Novorecife about noon, and was no sooner inside the wall than a man in the uniform of Abreu's security force said: "Is the senhor Felix Borel?"

"Huh?" He had been thinking in Gozashtandou so long that in his exhausted state the Brazilo-Portuguese of the spaceways at first was entirely meaningless to him.

"I said, is the senhor Felix Borel?"

"Yes. Sir Felix Borel to be exact. What—"

"I don't care what the senhor calls himself; he's under arrest."

"What for?"

"Violation of Regulation 368. Vamos, por favor!"

BOREL demanded a lawyer at the preliminary hearing, and since he could not pay for one, Judge Keshavachandra appointed Manuel Sandak. Abreu presented his case.

Borel asked: "Senhor Abrew, how the devil did you find out about this little project of mine so quickly?"

The judge said: "Address your remarks to the court, please. The Security Office has its methods, naturally. Have you anything pertinent to say?"

Borel whispered to Sandak, who rose and said: "It is the contention of the defense that the case presented by the Security Office is *prima facie* invalid, because the device in question, to wit: a wheel allegedly embodying the principle of perpetual motion, is inherently inoperative, being in violation of the well-known law of conservation of energy. Regulation 368 specifically states

that it's forbidden to communicate a device 'representing an improvement upon the science and technics already existing upon this planet.' But since this gadget wouldn't work by any stretch of the imagination it's no improvement on anything."

"You mean," sputtered Abreu, "that it was all a fake, a swindle?"

"Sure," said Borel, laughing heartily at the security officer's expression.

Abreu said: "My latest information says that you actually demonstrated the device the day before yesterday in the auditorium of the Order of Qarar at Mishe. What have you to say to that?"

"That was a fake too," said Borel, and told of the thread pulled by Zerdai in the wings.

"Just how is this gadget supposed to work?" asked the judge. Borel explained. Keshavachandra exclaimed: "Good Lord, that form of perpetual-motion device goes back to the European Middle Ages! I remember a case involving it when I was a patent lawyer in India." He turned to Abreu, saying: "Does that description check with your information?"

"Sim, Vossa Excelencia." He turned on Borel. "I knew you were a crook, but I never expected you to brag on the fact as part of a legal charge!"

"Bureaucrat!" sneered Borel.

"No personalities," snapped Judge Keshavachandra. "I'm afraid I can't bind him over, Senhor Cristovao."

"How, about a charge of swindling?" said Abreu hopefully.

Sandak jumped up. "You can't, your honor. The act was committed in Mikardand, so this court has no jurisdiction."

"How about holding him until we see if the Republic wants him back?" said Abreu.

Sandak said: "That won't work either. We have no extradition treaty with Mikardand because their legal code doesn't meet the minimum requirements of the Interplanetary Juridical Commission. Moreover the courts hold that a suspect may not be forcibly returned to a jurisdiction

where he'd be liable to be killed on sight."

The judge said: "I'm afraid he's right again, Senhor. However we still have some power over undesirables. Draw me a request for an expulsion order and I'll sign it quicker than you can say '*'non vult'*'. There are ships leaving in a few days, and we can give him his choice of them. I dislike inflicting him on other jurisdictions, but I don't know what else we can do." He added with a smile: "He'll probably turn up here again like a bad anna, with a cop three jumps behind him. Talk of perpetual motion, he's it!"

BOREL slouched into the Nova Iorque Bar and ordered a double comet. He fished his remaining money out of his pants pocket: about four and a half karda. This might feed him until he took off. Or it might provide him with a first-class binge. He decided on the binge; if he got drunk enough he wouldn't care about food in the interim.

He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror back of the bar, unshaven, with eyes as red as his hair and his gorgeous private uniform unpressed and weather-beaten. Most of the bravado had leaked out of him. If he'd avoided the Novorecife jail, he was still about to be shipped God knew where, without even a stake to get started again. The fact that he was getting his transportation free gave him no pleasure, for he knew space-travel for the ineffable bore it was.

Now that Zerdai was irrevocably lost to him, he kidded himself into thinking that he'd really intended to take her with him as he'd promised. He wallowed in self-pity. Maybe he should even go to work, repugnant though the idea appeared. (He always thought of reforming when he got into a jam like this.) But who'd employ him around Novorecife when he was in Abreu's black books? To go back to Mikardand would be silly. Why hadn't he done this, or that...

Borel became aware of a man drinking down the bar; a stout

middle-aged person with a look of sleepy good-nature

Borel said: "New here, senhor?"

"Yes," said the man. "I just came in two days ago from Earth."

"Good old Earth," said Borel.

"Good old Earth is right."

"Let me buy you a drink," said Borel.

"I will if you'll let me buy you one."

"Maybe that can be arranged. How long are you here for?"

"I don't know yet."

"What do you mean, you don't know yet?"

"I'll tell you. When I arrived, I wanted a good look at the planet. But now I've finished my official business and seen everything in Novorecife, and I can't go wandering around the native states because I don't speak the languages. I hoped to pick up a guide, but everybody seems too busy at some job of his own."

Borel, instantly alert, asked: "What sort of tour did you have in mind?"

"Oh, through the Gozashtandou Empire, perhaps touching the Free City of Madjbur, and maybe swinging around to Balhib on my way back."

"That would be a swell tour," said Borel. "Of course it would take you through some pretty wild country, and you'd have to ride an aya. No carriages. Also there'd be some risk."

"That's all right, I've ridden a horse ever since I was a boy. As for the risk, I've had a couple of centuries already, and I might as

well have some fun before I get really old."

"Have another," said Borel. "You know, we might be able to make a deal on that. I just finished a job. My name's Felix Borel, by the way."

"I'm Semion Trofimov," said the man. "Would you be seriously interested in acting as a guide? I thought from your rig that you were some official..."

Borel barely heard the rest. Semion Trofimov! A big-shot if ever there was one; a director of *Viagens Interplanetarias*, member of various public boards and commissions, officer of capitalistic and cooperative enterprises back on Earth... At least there'd be no question of the man's ability to pay well, and to override these local bureaucrats who wanted to ship Borel anywhere so long as it was a few light-years away.

"Sure, Senhor Semion," he said. "I'll give you a tour such as no Earthman ever had. There's a famous waterfall in northern Ruz, for instance, that few Earthmen have seen. And then do you know how the Kingdom of Balhib is organized? A very interesting set-up. In fact I've often thought a couple of smart Earthmen with a little capital could start an enterprise there, all perfectly legal, and clean up. I'll explain it later. Meanwhile we'd better get our gear together. Got a sword? And a riding-outfit? I know an honest Koloftu we can get for a servant, if I can find him, and I've got one aya already. As for that Balhib scheme, an absolutely sure thing..."

THE END

The Door is Wide Open

Dear Reader:

This is a repeat invitation to join the gang of science-fiction readers who write letters to the editor. The time is now. The place—DOWN TO EARTH, c/o FUTURE, Columbia Publications, Inc., 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. R. S. V. P.

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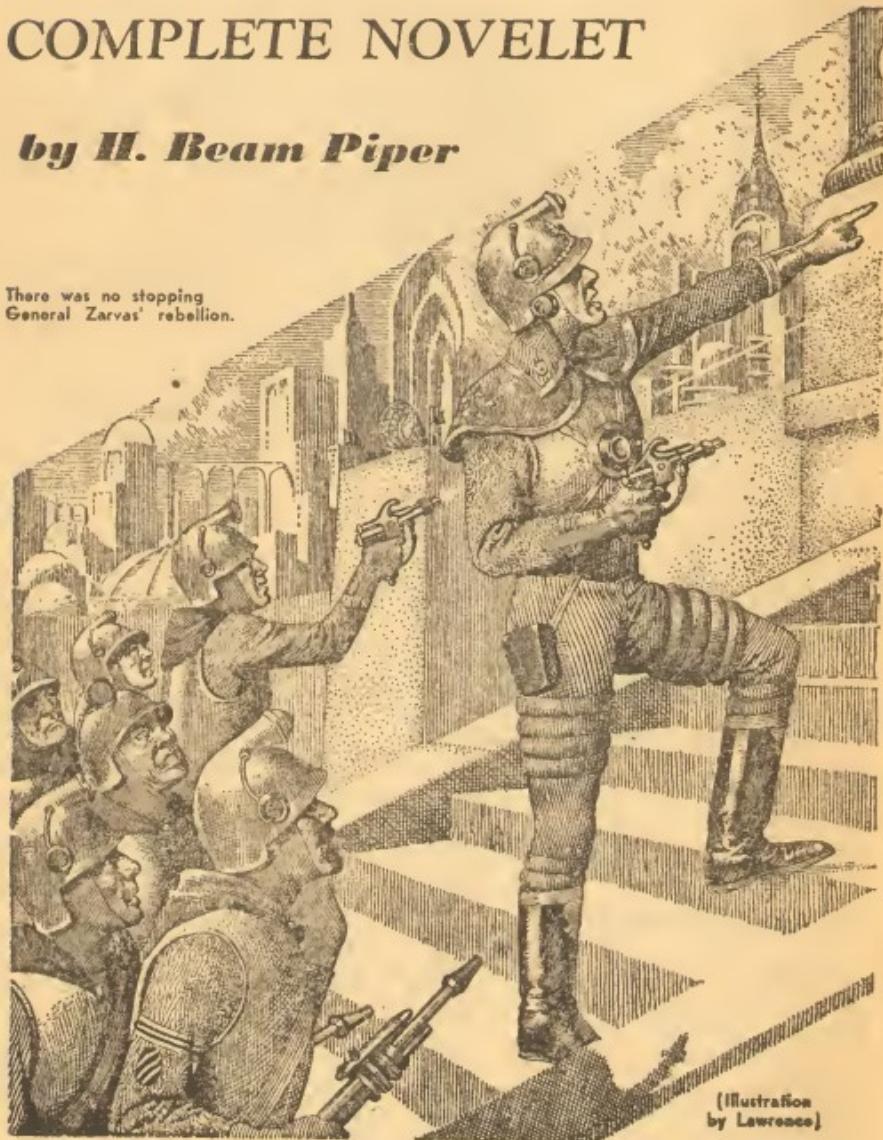
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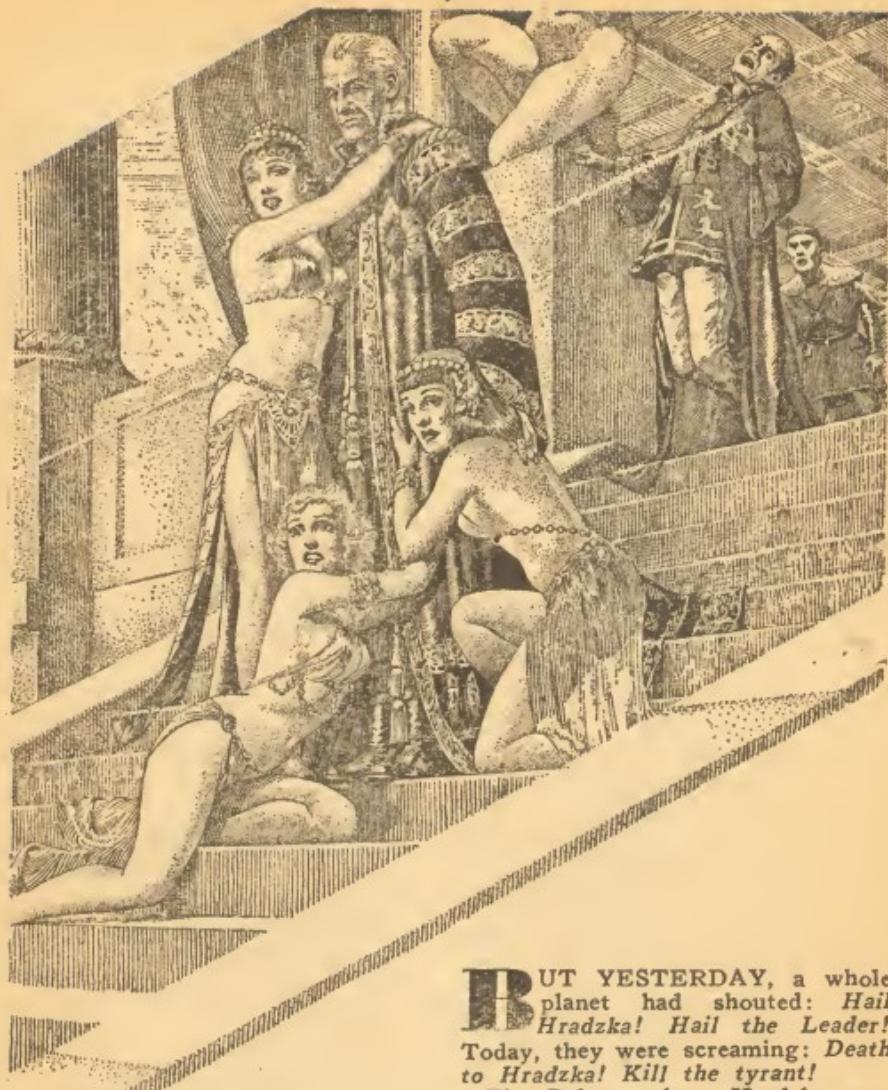
COMPLETE NOVELET

by H. Beam Piper

There was no stopping
General Zarvas' rebellion.



[Illustration
by Lawrence]



Hunted and hated in two worlds, Hradzka dreamed of a monomaniac's glory, stranded in the past with his knowledge of the future. But he didn't know the past quite well enough . . .

BUT YESTERDAY, a whole planet had shouted: *Hail Hradzka! Hail the Leader!* Today, they were screaming: *Death to Hradzka! Kill the tyrant!*

The Palace, where Hradzka, surrounded by his sycophants and guards, had lorded it over a solar system, was now an inferno. Those who had been too closely identified with the dictator's rule to hope for forgiveness were fighting to the last, seeking only a quick death in combat; one by one, their isolated points of resistance were being wiped out. The corridors and chambers of the huge palace were thronged with rebels, loud with their shouts, and

with the rasping hiss of heat-beams and the crash of blasters, reeking with the stench of scorched plastic and burned flesh, of hot metal and charred fabric. The living quarters were overrun; the mob smashed down walls and tore up floors in search of secret hiding-places. They found strange things—the space-ship that had been built under one of the domes, in readiness for flight to the still-loyal colonies on Mars or the Asteroid Belt, for instance—but Hradzka himself they could not find.

At last, the search reached the New Tower which reared its head five thousand feet above the palace, the highest thing in the city. They blasted down the huge steel doors, cut the power from the energy-screens. They landed from antigrav-cars on the upper levels. But except for barriers of metal and concrete and energy, they met with no opposition. Finally, they came to the spiral stairway which led up to the great metal sphere which capped the whole structure.

General Zarvas, the Army Commander who had placed himself at the head of the revolt, stood with his foot on the lowest step, his followers behind him. There was Prince Burvanny, the leader of the old nobility, and Ghorzesko Orhm, the merchant, and between them stood Tobbh, the chieftain of the mutinous slaves. There were clerks; laborers; poor but haughty nobles; and wealthy merchants who had long been forced to hide their riches from the dictator's tax-gatherers, and soldiers, and spacemen.

"You'd better let some of us go first sir," General Zarvas' orderly, a blood-stained bandage about his head, his uniform in rags, suggested. "You don't know what might be up there."

The General shook his head. "I'll go first," Zarvas Pol was not the man to send subordinates into danger ahead of himself. "To tell the truth, I'm afraid we won't find anything at all up there."

"You mean...?" Ghorzesko Orhm began.

"The 'time-machine,'" Zarvas Pol

replied. "If he's managed to get it finished, the Great Mind only knows where he may be, now. Or when."

He loosened the blaster in his holster and started up the long spiral. His followers spread out, below; sharp-shooters took position to cover his ascent. Prince Burvanny and Tobbh the Slave started to follow him. They hesitated as each motioned the other to precede him; then the nobleman followed the general, his blaster drawn, and the brawny slave behind him.

The door at the top was open, and Zarvas Pol stepped through but there was nothing in the great spherical room except a raised dias some fifty feet in diameter, its polished metal top strangely clean and empty. And a crumpled heap of burned cloth and charred flesh that had, not long ago, been a man. An old man with a white beard, and the seven-pointed star of the Learned Brothers on his breast, advanced to meet the armed intruders.

"So he is gone, Kradzy Zago?" Zarvas Pol said, holstering his weapon. "Gone in the 'time-machine', to hide in yesterday or tomorrow. And you let him go?"

The old one nodded. "He had a blaster, and I had none," He indicated the body on the floor. "Zoldy Jary had no blaster, either, but he tried to stop Hradzka. See, he squandered his life as a fool squanders his money, getting nothing for it. And a man's life is not money, Zarvas Pol."

"I do not blame you, Kradzy Zago," General Zarvas said. "But now you must get to work, and build us another 'time-machine', so that we can hunt him down."

"Does revenge mean so much to you, then?"

The soldier made an impatient gesture. "Revenge is for fools, like that pack of screaming beasts below. I do not kill for revenge; I kill because dead men do no harm."

"Hradzka will do us no more harm," the old scientist replied, "He is a thing of yesterday; of a time long past and half-lost in the mists of legend."

"No matter. As long as he exists, at any point in spacetime, Hradzka is still a threat. Revenge means much to Hradzka; he will return for it, when we least expect him."

The old man shook his head. "No, Zarvas Pol. Hradzka will not return."

* * *

HRADZKA holstered his blaster, threw the switch that sealed the "time-machine", put on the antigrav-unit and started the time-shift unit. He reached out and set the destination-dial for the mid-Fifty-Second Century of the Atomic Era. That would land him in the Ninth Age of Chaos, following the Two-Century War and the collapse of the World Theocracy. A good time for his purpose; the world would be slipping back into barbarism, and yet possess the technologies of former civilizations. A hundred little national states would be trying to regain social stability, competing and warring with one another. Hradzka glanced back over his shoulder at the cases of books, record-spools, tri-dimensional pictures, and scale-models. These people of the past would welcome him and his science of the future, would make him their leader.

He would start in a small way, by taking over the local feudal or tribal government, would arm his followers with weapons of the future. Then he would impose his rule upon neighboring tribes, or princedoms, or communes, or whatever, and build a strong sovereignty; from that he envisioned a world empire, a Solar System empire.

Then, he would build "time-machines", many "time-machines". He would recruit an army such as the universe had never seen, a swarm of men from every age in the past. At that point, he would return to the Hundredth Century of the Atomic Era, to wreak vengeance upon those who had risen against him. A slow smile grew on Hradzka's thin lips as he thought of the tortures with which he would put Zarvas Pol to death.

He glanced up at the great disc

of the indicator and frowned. Already he was back to the year 7500, A.E., and the temporal-displacement had not begun to slow. The disc was turning even more rapidly—7000, 6000, 5500; he gasped slightly. Then he had passed his destination; he was now in the Fortieth Century, but the indicator was slowing. The hairline crossed the Thirtieth Century, the Twentieth, the Fifteenth, the Tenth. He wondered what had gone wrong, but he had recovered from his fright by this time. When this insane machine stopped, as it must around the First Century of the Atomic Era, he would investigate, make repairs, then shift forward to his target-point. Hradzka was determined upon the Fifty-Second Century; he had made a special study of the history of that period, had learned the language spoken then, and he understood the methods necessary to gain power over the natives of that time.

The indicator-disc came to a stop, in the First Century. He switched on the magnifier and leaned forward to look; he had emerged into normal time in the year 10 of the Atomic Era, a decade after the first uranium-pile had gone into operation, and seven years after the first atomic bombs had been exploded in warfare. The altimeter showed that he was hovering at eight thousand feet above ground-level.

Slowly, he cut out the antigrav, letting the "time machine" down easily. He knew that there had been no danger of materializing inside anything; the New Tower had been built to put it above anything that had occupied that space-point at any moment within history, or legend, or even the geological knowledge of man. What lay below, however, was uncertain. It was night—the visiscreen showed only a star-dusted, moonless-sky, and dark shadows below. He snapped another switch; for a few micro-seconds a beam of intense light was turned on, automatically photographing the landscape under him. A second later, the developed picture was projected upon another screen; it showed only wood-

ed mountains and a barren, brush-grown valley.

TH E "TIME-MACHINE" came to rest with a soft jar and a crashing of broken bushes that was audible through the sound pickup. Hradzka pulled the main switch; there was a click as the shielding went out and the door opened. A breath of cool night air drew into the hollow sphere.

Then there was a loud bang inside the mechanism, and a flash of blue-white light which turned to pinkish flame with a nasty crackling. Curls of smoke began to rise from the square black box that housed the "time-shift" mechanism, and from behind the instrument-board. In a moment, everything was glowing-hot; dribblets of aluminum and silver were running down from the instruments. Then the whole interior of the "time-machine" was afire; there was barely time for Hradzka to leap through the open door.

The brush outside impeded him, and he used his blaster to clear a path for himself away from the big sphere, which was now glowing faintly on the outside. The heat grew in intensity, and the brush outside was taking fire. It was not until he had gotten two hundred yards from the machine that he stopped, realizing what had happened.

The machine, of course, had been sabotaged. That would have been young Zoldy, whom he had killed, or that old billy-goat, Kradzy Zago; the latter, most likely. He cursed both of them for having marooned him in this savage age, at the very beginning of atomic civilization, with all his printed and recorded knowledge destroyed. Oh, he could still gain mastery over these barbarians; he knew enough to fashion a crude blaster, or a heat-beam gun, or an atomic-electric conversion unit. But without his books and records, he could never build an antigrav unit, and the secret of the "temporal shift" was lost.

For "Time" is not an object, or a medium which can be travelled along. The "Time-Machine" was not a ve-

hicle; it was a mechanical process of displacement within the space-time continuum, and those who constructed it knew that it could not be used with the sort of accuracy that the dials indicated. Hradzka had ordered his scientists to produce a "Time Machine", and they had combined the possible—displacement within the space-time continuum—with the sort of fiction the dictator demanded, for their own well-being. Even had there been no sabotage, his return to his own "time" was nearly of zero probability.

The fire, spreading from the "time-machine", was blowing toward him; he observed the wind-direction and hurried around out of the path of the flames. The light enabled him to pick his way through the brush, and, after crossing a small stream, he found a rutted road and followed it up the mountainside until he came to a place where he could rest concealed until morning.

2

IT WAS BROAD daylight when he woke, and there was a strange throbbing sound; Hradzka lay motionless under the brush where he had slept, his blaster ready. In a few minutes, a vehicle came into sight, following the road down the mountainside.

It was a large thing, four-wheeled, with a projection in front which probably housed the engine and a cab for the operator. The body of the vehicle was simply an open rectangular box. There were two men in the cab, and about twenty or thirty more crowded into the box-body. These were dressed in faded and nondescript garments of blue and gray and brown; all were armed with crude weapons—axes, bill-hooks, long-handled instruments with serrated edges, and what looked like broad-bladed spears. The vehicle itself, which seemed to be propelled by some sort of chemical-explosion engine, was dingy and mud-splattered: the men in it were ragged and unshaven. Hradzka snorted in contempt; they were probably warriors

of the local tribe, going to the fire in the belief that it had been started by raiding enemies. When they found the wreckage of the "time-machine", they would no doubt believe that it was the chariot of some god, and drag it home to be venerated.

A plan of action was taking shape in his mind. First, he must get clothing of the sort worn by these people, and find a safe hiding-place for his own things. Then, pretending to be a deaf-mute, he would go among them to learn something of their customs and pick up the language. When he had done that, he would move on to another tribe or village, able to tell a credible story for himself. For a while, it would be necessary for him to do menial work, but in the end, he would establish himself among these people. Then he could gather around him a faction of those who were dissatisfied with whatever conditions existed, organize a conspiracy, make arms for his followers, and start his program of power-seizure.

The matter of clothing was attended to shortly after he had crossed the mountain and descended into the valley on the other side. Hearing a clinking sound some distance from the road, as of metal striking stone, Hradzka stole cautiously through the woods until he came within sight of a man who was digging with a mattock, uprooting small bushes of a particular sort, with rough gray bark and three-pointed leaves. When he had dug one up, he would cut off the roots and then slice away the root-bark with a knife, putting it into a sack. Hradzka's lip curled contemptuously; the fellow was gathering the stuff for medicinal use. He had heard of the use of roots and herbs for such purposes by the ancient savages.

The blaster would be no use here; it was too powerful, and would destroy the clothing that the man was wearing. He unfastened a strap from his belt and attached it to a stone to form a hand-loop, then, inched forward behind the lone herb-gatherer. When he was close enough,

he straightened and rushed forward, swinging his improvised weapon. The man heard him and turned, too late.

AFTER UNDRESSING his victim, Hradzka used the mattock to finish him, and then to dig a grave. The fugitive buried his own clothes with the murdered man, and donned the faded blue shirt, rough shoes, worn trousers and jacket. The blaster he concealed under the jacket, and he kept a few other Hundredth Century gadgets; these he would hide somewhere closer to his center of operations.

He had kept, among other things, a small box of food-concentrate capsules, and in one pocket of the newly acquired jacket he found a package containing food. It was rough and unappetizing fare—slices of cold cooked meat between slices of some cereal substance. He ate these before filling in the grave, and put the paper wrappings in with the dead man. Then, his work finished, he threw the mattock into the brush and set out again, grimacing disgustedly and scratching himself. The clothing he had appropriated was verminous.

Crossing another mountain, he descended into a second valley, and, for a time, lost his way among a tangle of narrow ravines. It was dark by the time he mounted a hill and found himself looking down another valley, in which a few scattered lights gave evidence of human habitations. Not wishing to arouse suspicion by approaching these in the night-time, he found a place among some young evergreens where he could sleep.

The next morning, having fasted on a concentrate capsule, he found a hiding-place for his blaster in a hollow tree. It was in a sufficiently prominent position so that he could easily find it again, and at the same time unlikely to be discovered by some native. Then he went down into the inhabited valley.

He was surprised at the ease with which he established contact with the natives. The first dwelling which he approached, a cluster of farm-buildings at the upper end of the val-

ley, gave him shelter. There was a man, clad in the same sort of rough garments Hradzka had taken from the body of the herb-gatherer, and a woman in a faded and shapeless dress. The man was thin and work-bent; the woman short and heavy. Both were past middle age.

He made inarticulate sounds to attract their attention, then gestured to his mouth and ears to indicate his assumed affliction. He rubbed his stomach to portray hunger. Looking about, he saw an ax sticking in a chopping-block, and a pile of wood near it, probably the fuel used by these people. He took the ax, split up some of the wood, then repeated the hunger-signs. The man and the woman both nodded, laughing; he was shown a pile of tree-limbs, and the man picked up a short billet of wood and used it like a measuring-rule, to indicate that all the wood was to be cut to that length.

Hradzka fell to work, and by mid-morning, he had all the wood cut. He had seen a circular stone, mounted on a trestle with a metal axle through it, and judged it to be some sort of a grinding-wheel, since it was fitted with a foot-pedal and a rusty metal can was set above it to spill water onto the grinding-edge. After chopping the wood, he carefully sharpened the ax, handing it to the man for inspection. This seemed to please the man; he clapped Hradzka on the shoulder, making commendatory sounds.

IT REQUIRED considerable time and ingenuity to make himself a more or less permanent member of the household. Hradzka had made a survey of the farmyard, noting the sorts of work that would normally be performed on the farm, and he pantomimed this work in its simpler operations. He pointed to the east, where the sun would rise, and to the zenith, and to the west. He made signs indicative of eating, and of sleeping, and of rising, and of working. At length, he succeeded in conveying his meaning.

There was considerable argument between the man and the woman, but

his proposal was accepted, as he expected that it would. It was easy to see that the work of the farm was hard for this aging couple; now, for a place to sleep and a little food, they were able to acquire a strong and intelligent slave.

In the days that followed, he made himself useful to the farm people; he fed the chickens and the livestock, milked the cow, worked in the fields. He slept in a small room at the top of the house, under the eaves, and ate with the man and woman in the farmhouse kitchen.

It was not long before he picked up a few words which he had heard his employers using, and related them to the things or acts spoken of. And he began to notice that these people, in spite of the crudities of their own life, enjoyed some of the advantages of a fairly complex civilization. Their implements were not hand-craft products, but showed machine workmanship. There were two objects hanging on hooks on the kitchen wall which he was sure were weapons. Both had wooden shoulder-stocks, and wooden fore-pieces; they had long tubes extending to the front, and triggers like blasters. One had double tubes mounted side-by-side, and double triggers; the other had an octagonal tube mounted over a round tube, and a loop extension on the trigger-guard. Then, there was a box on the kitchen wall, with a mouthpiece and a cylindrical tube on a cord. Sometimes a bell would ring out of the box, and the woman would go to this instrument, take down the tube and hold it to her ear, and talk into the mouthpiece. There was another box from which voices would issue, of people conversing, or of orators, or of singing, and sometimes instrumental music. None of these were objects made by savages; these people probably traded with some fairly high civilization. They were not illiterate; he found printed matter, indicating the use of some phonetic alphabet, and paper pamphlets containing printed reproductions of photographs as well as verbal text.

There was also a vehicle on the

farm, powered, like the one he had seen on the road, by an engine in which a hydrocarbon liquid-fuel was exploded. He made it his business to examine this minutely, and to study its construction and operation until he was thoroughly familiar with it.

It was not until the third day after his arrival that the chickens began to die. In the morning, Hradzka found three of them dead when he went to feed them, the rest drooping unhealthily; he summoned the man and showed him what he had found. The next morning, they were all dead, and the cow was sick. She gave bloody milk, that evening, and the next morning she lay in her stall and would not get up.

The man and the woman were also beginning to sicken, though both of them tried to continue their work. It was the woman who first noticed that the plants around the farmhouse were withering and turning yellow.

THREE DAYS later, Hradzka went to the stable with Hradzka and looked at the cow. Shaking his head, he limped back to the house, and returned carrying one of the weapons from the kitchen—the one with the single trigger and the octagonal tube. As he entered the stable, he jerked down and up on the loop extension of the trigger-guard, then put the weapon to his shoulder and pointed it at the cow. It made a flash, and roared louder even than a hand-blaster, and the cow jerked convulsively and was dead. The man then indicated by signs that Hradzka was to drag the dead cow out of the stable, dig a hole, and bury it. This Hradzka did, carefully examining the wound in the cow's head—the weapon, he decided, was not an energy-weapon, but a simple solid-missile projector.

By evening, neither the man nor the woman were able to eat, and both seemed to be suffering intensely. The man used the communicating-instrument on the wall, probably calling on his friends for help. Hradzka did what he could to make them comfortable, cooked his own meal, washed the dishes as he had seen the woman doing, and tidied up the kitchen.

IT WAS NOT long before people, men and women whom he had seen on the road or who had stopped at the farmhouse while he had been there, began arriving, some carrying baskets of food; and shortly after Hradzka had eaten, a vehicle like the farmer's, but in better condition and of better quality, arrived and a young man got out of it and entered the house, carrying a leather bag. He was apparently some sort of a scientist; he examined the man and his wife, asked many questions, and administered drugs. He also took samples for blood-tests and urinalysis. This, Hradzka considered, was another of the many contradictions he had encountered among these people—this man behaved like an educated scientist, and seemingly had nothing in common with the peasant herb-gatherer on the mountainside.

The fact was that Hradzka was worried. The strange death of the animals, the blight which had smitten the trees and vegetables around the farm, and the sickness of the farmer and his woman, all mystified him. He did not know of any disease which would affect plants and animals and humans; he wondered if some poisonous gas might not be escaping from the earth near the farmhouse. However, he had not, himself, been affected. He also disliked the way in which the doctor and the neighbors seemed to be talking about him. While he had come to a considerable revision of his original opinion about the culture-level of these people, it was not impossible that they might suspect him of having caused the whole thing by witchcraft; at any moment, they might fall upon him and put him to death. In any case, there was no longer any use in his staying here, and it might be wise if he left at once.

Accordingly, he filled his pockets with food from the pantry and slipped out of the farmhouse; before his absence was discovered he was well on his way down the road.

3

THAT NIGHT, Hradzka slept under a bridge across a fairly wide stream; the next morning, he followed the road until he came to a town. It was not a large place; there were perhaps four or five hundred houses and other buildings in it. Most of these were dwellings like the farmhouse where he had been staying, but some were much larger, and seemed to be places of business. One of these latter was a concrete structure with wide doors at the front; inside, he could see men working on the internal-combustion vehicles which seemed to be in almost universal use. Hradzka decided to obtain employment here.

It would be best, he decided, to continue his pretense of being a deaf-mute. He did not know whether a world-language were in use at this time or not, and even if not, the pretense of being a foreigner unable to speak the local dialect might be dangerous. So he entered the vehicle-repair shop and accosted a man in a clean shirt who seemed to be issuing instructions to the workers, going into his pantomime of the homeless mute seeking employment.

The master of the repair-shop merely laughed at him, however. Hradzka became more insistent in his manner, making signs to indicate his hunger and willingness to work. The other men in the shop left their tasks and gathered around; there was much laughter and unmistakably ribald and derogatory remarks. Hradzka was beginning to give up hope of getting employment here when one of the workmen approached the master and whispered something to him.

The two of them walked away, conversing in low voices. Hradzka thought he understood the situation; no doubt the workman, thinking to lighten his own labor, was urging that the vagrant be employed, for no other pay than food and lodging. At length, the master assented to his employee's urgings; he returned, showed Hradzka a hose and a bucket

and sponges and cloths, and set him to work cleaning the mud from one of the vehicles. Then, after seeing that the work was being done properly, he went away, entering a room at one side of the shop.

About twenty minutes later, another man entered the shop. He was not dressed like any of the other people whom Hradzka had seen; he wore a gray tunic and breeches, polished black boots, and a cap with a visor and a metal insignia on it; on a belt, he carried a holstered weapon like a blaster.

After speaking to one of the workers, who pointed Hradzka out to him, he approached the fugitive and said something. Hradzka made gestures at his mouth and ears and made gargling sounds; the newcomer shrugged and motioned him to come with him, at the same time producing a pair of handcuffs from his belt and jingling them suggestively.

In a few seconds, Hradzka tried to analyze the situation and estimate its possibilities. The newcomer was a soldier, or, more likely, a policeman, since manacles were a part of his equipment. Evidently, since the evening before, a warning had been made public by means of communicating devices such as he had seen at the farm, advising people that a man of his description, pretending to be a deaf-mute, should be detained and the police notified; it had been for that reason that the workman had persuaded his master to employ Hradzka. No doubt he would be accused of causing the conditions at the farm by sorcery.

HRADZKA shrugged and nodded, then went to the water-tap to turn off the hose he had been using. He disconnected it, coiled it and hung it up, and then picked up the water-bucket. Then, without warning, he hurled the water into the policeman's face, sprang forward, swinging the bucket by the bale, and hit the man on the head. Releasing his grip on the bucket, he tore the blaster or whatever it was from the holster.

One of the workers swung a hammer, as though to throw it.

Hradzka aimed the weapon at him and pulled the trigger; the thing belched fire and kicked back painfully in his hand, and the man fell. He used it again to drop the policeman, then thrust it into the waistband of his trousers and ran outside. The thing was not a blaster at all, he realized—only a missile-projector like the big weapons at the farm, utilizing the force of some chemical explosive.

The policeman's vehicle was standing outside. It was a small, single-seat, two wheeled affair. Having become familiar with the principles of these hydro-carbon engines from examination of the vehicle of the farm, and accustomed as he was to far more complex mechanisms than this crude affair, Hradzka could see at a glance how to operate it. Springing onto the saddle, he kicked away the folding support and started the engine. Just as he did, the master of the repair-shop ran outside, one of the small hand-weapons in his hand, and fired several shots. They all missed, but Hradzka heard the whining sound of the missiles passing uncomfortably close to him.

It was imperative that he recover the blaster he had hidden in the hollow tree at the head of the valley. By this time, there would be a concerted search under way for him, and he needed a better weapon than the solid-missile projector he had taken from the policeman. He did not know how many shots the thing contained, but if it propelled solid missiles by chemical explosion, there could not have been more than five or six such charges in the cylindrical part of the weapon which he had assumed to be the charge-holder. On the other hand, his blaster, a weapon of much greater power, contained enough energy for five hundred blasts, and with it were eight extra energy-capsules, giving him a total of four thousand five hundred blasts.

Handling the two-wheeled vehicle was no particular problem; although he had never ridden on anything of the sort before, it was child's play

compared to controlling a Hundredth Century strato-rocket, and Hradzka was a skilled rocket-pilot.

Several times he passed vehicles on the road—the passenger vehicles with enclosed cabins, and cargo-vehicles piled high with farm produce. Once he encountered a large number of children, gathered in front of a big red building with a flag-staff in front, from which a queer flag, with horizontal red and white stripes and a white-spotted blue device in the corner, flew. They scattered off the road in terror at his approach; fortunately, he hit none of them, for at the speed at which he was traveling, such a collision would have wrecked his light vehicle.

AS HE approached the farm where he had spent the past few days, he saw two passenger-vehicles standing by the road. One was a black one, similar to the one in which the physician had come to the farm, and the other was white with black trimmings and bore the same device he had seen on the cap of the policeman. A policeman was sitting in the driver's seat of this vehicle, and another policeman was standing beside it, breathing smoke with one of the white paper cylinders these people used. In the farm-yard, two men were going about with a square black box; to this box, a tube was connected by a wire, and they were passing the tube about over the ground.

The policeman who was standing beside the vehicle saw him approach, and blew his whistle, then drew the weapon from his belt. Hradzka, who had been expecting some attempt to halt him, had let go the right-hand steering handle and drawn his own weapon; as the policeman drew, he fired at him. Without observing the effect of the shot, he sped on; before he had rounded the bend above the farm, several shots were fired after him.

A mile beyond, he came to the place where he had hidden the blaster. He stopped the vehicle and jumped off, plunging into the brush

and racing toward the hollow tree. Just as he reached it, he heard a vehicle approach and stop, and the door of the police vehicle slam. Hradzka's fingers found the belt of his blaster; he dragged it out and buckled it on, tossing away the missile weapon he had been carrying.

Then, crouching behind the tree, he waited. A few moments later, he caught a movement in the brush toward the road. He brought up the blaster, aimed and squeezed the trigger. There was a faint bluish glow at the muzzle, and a blast of energy tore through the brush, smashing the molecular structure of everything that stood in the way. There was an involuntary shout of alarm from the direction of the road; at least one of the policemen had escaped the blast. Hradzka holstered his weapon and crept away for some distance, keeping under cover, then turned and waited for some sign of the presence of his enemies. For some time nothing happened; he decided to turn hunter against the men who were hunting him. He started back in the direction of the road, making a wide circle, flitting silently from rock to bush and from bush to tree, stopping often to look and listen.

This finally brought him upon one of the policemen, and almost terminated his flight at the same time. He must have grown over-confident and careless; suddenly a weapon roared, and a missile smashed through the brush inches from his face. The shot had come from his left and a little to the rear. Whirling, he blasted four times, in rapid succession, then turned and fled for a few yards, dropping and crawling behind a rock. When he looked back, he could see wisps of smoke rising from the shattered trees and bushes which had absorbed the energy-output of his weapon, and he caught a faint odor of burned flesh. One of his pursuers, at least, would pursue him no longer.

He slipped away, down into the tangle of ravines and hollows in which he had wandered the day before his arrival at the farm. For the

time being, he felt safe, and finally confident that he was not being pursued, he stopped to rest. The place where he stopped seemed familiar, and he looked about. In a moment, he recognized the little stream, the pool where he had bathed his feet, the clump of seedling pines under which he had slept. He even found the silver-foil wrapping from the food concentrate capsule.

But there had been a change, since the night when he had slept here. Then the young pines had been green and alive; now they were blighted, and their needles had turned brown. Hradzka stood for a long time, looking at them. It was the same blight that had touched the plants around the farmhouse. And here, among the pine needles on the ground, lay a dead bird.

It took some time for him to admit, to himself, the implications of vegetation, the chickens, the cow, the farmer and his wife, had all sickened and died. He had been in this place, and now, when he had returned, he found that death had followed him here, too.

DURING THE early centuries of the Atomic Era, he knew, there had been great wars, the stories of which had survived even to the Hundredth Century. Among the weapons that had been used, there had been artificial plagues and epidemics, caused by new types of bacteria developed in laboratories, against which the victims had possessed no protection. Those germs and viruses had persisted for centuries, and gradually had lost their power to harm mankind. Suppose, now, that he had brought some of them back with him, to a century before they had been developed. Suppose, that was, that he were a human plague-carrier. He thought of the vermin that had infested the clothing he had taken from the man he had killed on the other side of the mountain; they had not troubled him after the first day.

There was a throbbing mechanical sound somewhere in the air; he

looked about, and finally identified its source. A small aircraft had come over the valley from the other side of the mountain and was circling lazily overhead. He froze, shrinking back under a pine-tree; as long as he remained motionless, he would not be seen, and soon the thing would go away. He was beginning to understand why the search for him was being pressed so relentlessly; as long as he remained alive, he was a menace to everybody in this First Century world.

He got out his supply of food concentrates, saw that he had only three capsules left, and put them away again. For a long time, he sat under the dying tree, chewing on a twig and thinking. There must be some way in which he could overcome, or even utilize, his inherent deadliness to these people. He might find some isolated community, conceal himself near it, invade it at night and infect it, and then, when everybody was dead, move in and take it for himself. But was there any such isolated community? The farmhouse where he had worked had been fairly remote, yet its inhabitants had been in communication with the outside world, and the physician had come immediately in response to their call for help.

The little aircraft had been circling overhead, directly above the place where he lay hidden. For a while, Hradzka was afraid it had spotted him, and was debating the advisability of using his blaster on it. Then it banked, turned and went away. He watched it circle over the valley on the other side of the mountain, and got to his feet.

4

ALMOST AT once, there was a new sound—a multiple throbbing, at a quick, snarling tempo that hinted at enormous power, growing louder each second. Hradzka stiffened and drew his blaster; as he did, five more aircraft swooped over the crest of the mountain and came rushing down toward

him; not aimlessly, but as though they knew exactly where he was. As they approached, the leading edges of their wings sparkled with light, branches began flying from the trees about him, and there was a loud hammering noise.

He aimed a little in front of them and began blasting. A wing flew from one of the aircraft, and it plunged downward. Another came apart in the air; a third burst into flames. The other two zoomed upward quickly. Hradzka swung his blaster after them, blasting again and again. He hit a fourth with a blast of energy, knocking it to pieces, and then the fifth was out of range. He blasted at it twice, but without effect; a hand-blaster was only good for a thousand yards at the most.

Holstering his weapon, he hurried away, following the stream and keeping under cover of trees. The last of the attacking aircraft had gone away, but the little scout-plane was still circling about, well out of blaster-range.

Once or twice, Hradzka was compelled to stay hidden for some time, not knowing the nature of the pilot's ability to detect him. It was during one of these waits that the next phase of the attack developed.

It began, like the last one, with a distant roar that swelled in volume until it seemed to fill the whole world. Then, fifteen or twenty thousand feet out of blaster-range, the new attackers swept into sight.

There must have been fifty of them, huge tapering things with wide-spread wings, flying in close formation, wave after V-shaped wave. He stood and stared at them, amazed; he had never imagined that such aircraft existed in the First Century. Then a high-pitched screaming sound cut through the roar of the propellers, and for an instant he saw countless small specks in the sky, falling downward.

The first bomb-salvo landed in the young pines, where he had fought against the first air attack. Great gouts of flame shot upward, and smoke, and flying earth and debris.

Hradzka turned and started to run. Another salvo fell in front of him; he veered to the left and plunged on through the undergrowth. Now the bombs were falling all about him, deafening him with their thunder, shaking him with concussion. He dodged, frightened, as the trunk of a tree came crashing down beside him. Then something hit him across the back, knocking him flat. For a moment, he lay stunned, then tried to rise. As he did, a searing light filled his eyes and a wave of intolerable heat swept over him. Then darkness...

* * *

CENO, ZARVAS POL," Kradzy Zago repeated, "Hradzka will not return; the 'time-machine' was sabotaged."

"So? By you?" the soldier asked.
The scientist nodded. "I knew the purpose for which he intended it. Hradzka was not content with having enslaved a whole Solar System; he hungered to bring tyranny and serfdom to all the past and all the future as well; he wanted to be master not only of the present but of the centuries that were and were to be, as well. I never took part in politics, Zarvas Pol; I had no hand in this revolt. But I could not be party to such a crime as Hradzka contemplated when it lay within my power to prevent it."

"The machine will take him out of our space-time continuum, or back to a time when this planet was a swirling cloud of flaming gas?" Zarvas Pol asked.

Kradzy Zago shook his head. "No, the unit is not powerful enough for that. It will only take him about ten thousand years into the past. But then, when it stops, the machine will destroy itself. It may destroy Hradzka with it, or he may escape. But if he does, he will be left stranded ten thousand years ago, when he can do us no harm."

"Actually, it did not operate as he imagined and there is an infinitely small chance that he could have returned to our 'time', in any event. But I wanted to insure against even so small a chance."

"We can't be sure of that," Zarvas Pol objected. "He may know more about the machine than you think; enough more to build another like it. So you must build me a machine, and I'll take back a party of volunteers and hunt him down."

"That would not be necessary, and you would only share his fate." Then, apparently changing the subject, Kradzy Zago asked: "Tell me, Zarvas Pol; have you never heard the legends of the Deadly Radiations?"

General Zarvas smiled. "Who has not? Every cadet at the Officers' College dreams of re-discovering them, to use as a weapon, but nobody ever has. We hear these tales of how, in the early days, atomic engines and piles and fission-bombs emitted particles which were utterly deadly, which would make anything with which they came in contact deadly, which would bring a horrible death to any human being. But these are only myths. All the ancient experiments have been duplicated time and again, and the deadly-radiation effect has never been observed. Some say that it is a mere old-wives' terror-tale; some say that the deaths were caused by fear of atomic energy, when it was still unfamiliar; others contend that the fundamental nature of atomic energy has altered by the degeneration of the fissionable matter. For my own part, I'm not enough of a scientist to have an opinion."

THE OLD one smiled wanly. "None of these theories are correct. In the beginning of the Atomic Era, the Deadly Radiations existed. They still exist, but they are no longer deadly, because all life on this planet has adapted itself to such radiations, and all living things are now immune to them."

"And Hradzka has returned to a time when such immunity did not exist? But would that not be to his advantage?"

"Remember, General, that man has been using atomic energy for ten thousand years. Our whole world has

become drenched with radioactivity. The planet, the seas, the atmosphere, and every living thing, are all radioactive, now. Radioactivity is as natural to us as the air we breathe. Now, you remember hearing of the great wars of the first centuries of the Atomic Era, in which whole nations were wiped out, leaving only hundreds of survivors out of millions. You, no doubt, think that such tales are products of ignorant and barbaric imagination, but I assure you, they are literally true. It was not the blast-effect of a few bombs which created such holocausts, but the radiations released by the bombs. And those who survived to carry on the race were men and women whose systems resisted the radiations, and they transmitted to their progeny that power of resistance. In many cases, their children were mutants—not monsters, although there were many of them, too, which did not survive—but humans who were immune to radioactivity."

"An interesting theory, Kradzy Zago," the soldier commented. "And one which conforms both to what we know of atomic energy and to the ancient legends. Then you would say that those radiations are still deadly—to the non-immune?"

"Exactly. And Hradzka, his body emitting those radiations, has returned to the First Century of the Atomic Era—to a world without immunity."

General Zarvas' smile vanished. "Man!" he cried in horror. "You have loosed a carrier of death among those innocent people of the past!"

Kradzy Zago nodded. "That is true. I estimate that Hradzka will probably cause the death of a hundred or so people, before he is dealt with. But dealt with he will be. Tell me, General; if a man should appear now, out of nowhere, spreading a strange and horrible plague wherever he went, what would you do?"

"Why, I'd hunt him down and kill him," General Zarvas replied. "Not for anything he did, but for the meance he was. And then, I'd cover

his body with a mass of concrete bigger than this palace."

"Precisely." Kradzy Zago smiled. "And the military commanders and political leaders of the First Century were no less ruthless or efficient than you. You know how atomic energy was first used? There was an ancient nation, upon the ruins of whose cities we have built our own, which was famed for its idealistic humanitarianism. Yet that nation, treacherously attacked, created the first atomic bombs in self defense, and used them. It is among the people of that nation that Hradzka has emerged."

"But would they recognize him as the cause of the calamity he brings among them?"

"Of course. He will emerge at the time when atomic energy is first being used. They will have detectors for the Deadly Radiations—detectors we know nothing of, today, for a detection instrument must be free from the thing it is intended to detect, and today everything is radioactive. It will be a day or so before they discover what is happening to them, and not a few will die in that time, I fear; but once they have found out what is killing their people, Hradzka's days—no, his hours—will be numbered."

"A mass of concrete bigger than this place," Tobbh the Slave repeated General Zarvas' words. "*The Ancient Spaceport!*"

Prince Burvanny clapped him on the shoulder. "Tobbh, man! You've hit it!"

"You mean...?" Kradzy Zago began.

"Yes. You all know of it. It's stood for nobody knows how many millennia, and nobody's ever decided what it was, to begin with, except that somebody, once, filled a valley with concrete, level from mountaintop to mountaintop. The accepted theory is that it was done for a firing-stand for the first Moon-rocket. But gentlemen, our friend Tobbh's explained it. It is the tomb of Hradzka, and it has been the tomb of Hradzka for ten thousand years before Hradzka was born!"

★ Beware of "Tomorrow" ★

IN THE EARLIER days of science fiction, many, if not most of the stories dealing with times to come painted glowing pictures of "tomorrow". Scientific progress was considered as a great "Good" in itself, as the guarantee of an end to major human problems when more and still more wonderful inventions supposedly "emancipated" humankind from all kinds of drudgery and insecurity: the writers assumed that, once relieved from menial labor, people would no longer display such anti-social tendencies as greed, envy, hate, a desire to dominate, etc.

As science-fiction continued, however, others scribes began to be more wary about the future. We began to see stories, some taking place in the late 1940s and early 1950s, which depicted folk of the, then, future as not much better off than people of the present—which was the 20s and 30s, at the time. It was still foreseen that mechanical progress could make for greater living comfort for many; but the authors allowed for a continuance of all manner of irrational behaviour and motivations.

For we can see, if we look without prejudice, that there is not much basic difference between the motivations that inform most people today and the basic motivations behind the behaviour patterns of the so-called barbarous past. Differences? Of course there are differences—but too many of them are the kind which do not make much difference.

Consider the intrigues of the Middle Ages and the intrigues of the Cold War; ponder the struggle between the Moslem and the Western Worlds, and the struggles for the World today. Read the various speeches and political, moral, etc. exhortations of politicians in Republican and Imperial Rome; in an astonishing number of instances, only a few phrases would have to be changed in order for them to sound pretty much like what you read in last week's papers. Some could be reprinted outright and pass for current propaganda.

Quite true, more "innocent" bystanders get killed or maimed in an atomic attack than in the attack on one of the old walled cities, but those who were killed then were no less dead than the victims of the Bomb. And, way back Then, there was still the proposition that if such and such a "Man

of the People" only got into high office, things would be very much different. It was all the fault of the Aristocrats, etc. Well, at times the "People's Choice" did get in... We can look back now and discover that a number of the alleged scoundrels, supposedly responsible for all the misery were not much better or much worse than those who tossed them out.

A number of science fiction writers have taken such things into account in trying to depict the future, and a lot of the "tomorrows" they've foreseen have not made for inspiring contemplation. It suggests that many of the long-believed-in "solutions" for human misery do not solve very much. That doesn't mean that there isn't any answer—or set of answers; it just indicates that the chronic solutions that keep on popping up aren't what is needed.

While one is formulating along these lines, it isn't hard to decide that perhaps "Progress" in the villain of the piece, and that a simple way out would just be to "Stop Progress". Call a halt to scientific discovery; destroy the super weapons; bury the books; get rid of the "Scientists", etc. Only such an answer isn't simple, and it has never worked. (It's been tried on a small scale a number of times; results uniformly dismal.)

You can't go on figures, sign-posts, and logic for this sort of thing. Figures may never lie, but Liars figure; sign posts may point the way, but they don't go there themselves, and they aren't proof against tampering; you can work out neat bits of logic, but if your assumptions are false-to-fact (and too often this is the case when most people try to work out human problems with logic) you'll emerge with beautifully-worked out unsanity.

We don't know the answers ourselves, and we don't know anyone who does—that is, we do not know of any substantial force in operation that is working with any "solution" which isn't a repetition of, or variation on, what's been tried and shown false before. That is why we suggest, "Beware of Tomorrow". "Beware," here, doesn't mean "run like hell"; it means "don't sit back and take it for granted that 'Tomorrow will be better'."

The Editor

INVITATION FROM THE STARS

by MORTON KLASS

The stranger came in peace, with an invitation to the peoples of Earth. But to the leaders of Earth, beings from the stars could have only one meaning!



HE NOTICED him right after we left Poughkeepsie, on the last lap of our trip from Chicago to New York. He was strolling along, knapsack on his back, fishing rod over one shoulder, whistling into the soft spring twilight as if he hadn't a care in the world.

There weren't many cars traveling by that time of night, so when he turned and waved at us with a friendly grin, I stopped and asked him if he wanted a lift. My wife, Gwen, frowned at me because she doesn't like hitchhikers.

Now, usually the first thing a person asks when you've given him a ride is where you're heading for. This young man was different; after thanking us, and arranging his rod carefully, he leaned back in the rear seat and said, "Do you have the right time?"

Gwen was startled, but she glanced at the dashboard clock and said, a little doubtfully, "Ten minutes after six. Why? Are you in a hurry to get somewhere?"

The young man smiled and shook his head. I was watching his face in the mirror, and, even if I hadn't heard the story, it would have been

a long time before I forgot that funny, twisted smile.

He hauled a big turnip watch out of an inner pocket and inspected the face closely before answering Gwen. She half-turned to stare at the young man over the back of the seat.

"No," he said "I'm not in a hurry, not the way you mean. And I'm not going anywhere in particular...tonight. You people can let me off any place you like; it really doesn't make any difference."

He gazed at the roof of the car as if he didn't know it was there.

"Out of work?" Gwen inquired.

"Not working," he said briefly.

Gwen frowned, because she doesn't like people who don't work.

"Just traveling around?" I asked quickly, to forestall trouble.

"Yup. I thought I'd like to see the country before—"

"Before what?" Gwen prompted.

"I could tell you," the young man said, "because L-83 said it wouldn't make any difference if I told people. You probably won't believe me, though. Nobody does."

Gwen gave me a quick look which told me she'd have a long talk with me later about giving rides to strangers. I tried, unsuccessfully, to avoid

her eyes. "I work for a radio station," I said. "You'd be surprised what I'd believe. Go ahead and talk, if you want to. I'm Tom Anders, by the way. This is my wife, Gwen."

The young man tipped his battered hat to Gwen. "How do, Ma'am. My name is Pete Billings. From Nebraska. Ma and I had a small farm out there. That's where the spaceship landed: right in the pump pasture where I was plowing."

I have good nerves, and I always keep both hands on the wheel, but for the next ten seconds the right side of the car was on the road shoulder, and I'll never understand why we didn't leave the concrete completely.

"Spaceship?" Gwen squeaked.

"Yup." Pete Billings seemed embarrassed. "Told you you wouldn't believe me."

I got the wheel under control. "You mean—Look, it's a little hard to swallow, but we'd like to hear the rest of the story."

Pete shrugged. He checked his turnip watch again, put it away, and settled back in his seat. "Guess old L-83 was right, at that. Nobody *does* remember—except me. Anyway, as I was saying..."

* * *

THREE I WAS, sitting easy on our new Ford tractor, thinking lazy things—like how pretty the cows looked, all brown-and-white and black-and-white on the green hill—and maybe wondering what Ma was making for lunch. Everything was real peaceful, except for the tractor exhaust and the midges buzzing around my head.

Suddenly, there was a kind of flicker and sort of wind, and there this spaceship was, about twenty yards in front of me, digging into about an acre of good bottom land.

Of course, I didn't know it was a spaceship then; I figured some Air Force plane had made a forced landing, though I'd never seen any plane like this before.

I killed the motor and walked over to the thing. It was low and roundish and a funny grey color that wasn't—well, that wasn't shiny. I cir-

cled it slowly, getting a little worried because it didn't have any openings or any Air Force markings—or any markings at all, for that matter—and I was beginning to think maybe it was from some foreign country.

Just before I started around it a second time, I saw a white spot appear on the grey surface. It started growing, fast as a match lighting, and pretty soon it was half again as tall as a man. Then it stopped growing and started shimmering.

A tall guy, almost seven feet, stepped through it onto the ground and looked at me. I looked at him.

I said he was a man, and I'll stick to it, no matter what he told me later on. But I'll admit he was wearing awful funny clothes—looked like green cellophane—when he first stepped out, and he was fuzzy around the edges in a way that hurt my eyes and made me want to turn away.

Anyway, he stared at me, opened his mouth a few times and closed it as if he thought better of it. Then he said, "O man—no, that's wrong."

He slapped a little round black box sticking to his left side, and I almost fell on my face with surprise! He was wearing faded overalls, patched blue shirt, and a straw hat: quick as that! Neatest trick I ever saw!

He still had the black box, only it was on the outside of the overalls now. He took a blade of timothy out of his mouth and said, "Howdy neighbor. Nice day, ain't it?"

"Yup," I said, wondering about that quick-change act, but feeling happier that things were becoming normal. "Ma says it might rain 'fore evening, though. You from the Air Force?"

"Uh, no." He seemed to have trouble finding the right words. "Funny, thought they'd be more advanced than this," he muttered to himself. Then he brightened. "I'll put it this way: I'm from another world, around a different star out in space. In fact, I represent a whole bunch of other worlds. I'm here to make some... tests, and also to tell your people

something. That's the best way I can say it right now. Who runs things around here?"

I grinned and told him, "Look friend; I'm Pete Billings, a good American citizen who can keep his mouth shut. If you want, I'll take you to Mayor Brown who runs the county seat. He'll help you get to your base."

He shook his head, exasperated. "No! Look, I'm L-83, Special Examiner, and I've got to see the most important people! Try to think, man! The President? No-o-o. What's a national government? Never mind, you just thought of it! The United Nations! Where is that? New York...hm-m, eastern seaboard. Thanks!"

The funny thing was, I hadn't said a word! You'd think he was reading my mind!

He started to turn back to the white spot he'd come out of, then stopped. "Care to come along?" he asked. "You're the first Earthman to meet me and they'd probably want your reactions. Besides, when I speak to the authorities, it will be an official statement, and I don't have too much time to spend. The analyzers will have completed their recordings in a few hours, and I'll be ready to leave. It would save time if I told you all the background details to pass on to your people."

Things had begun to move too fast for me.

"What about Ma?" I asked. "Since Pa died, she's been pretty lonely. If I'm not there for lunch, she'll get worried."

L-83 waved his hand impatiently. "Lunch won't be ready for about three hours; I'll have you back by then. Are you coming?"

WELL, I'VE always wanted to see those United Nation fellows I'd been hearing about on the radio, and, besides, New York and back, in three hours! So I followed L-83 through the white spot into the spaceship.

I was trying to figure out what the white spot was made of—I could see it all right, but when I touched it it was like trying to lean against

fog—when I realized I wasn't standing on anything! I was floating in the air!

Let me tell you I was scared for a few seconds right then, even with L-83 floating at my right elbow and trying to explain how the inside of the spaceship was weightless or gravity-free, or some such thing; all I had to do was relax and sort of swim wherever I wanted to go. Then, when I had calmed down, I took a good look around and got scared all over again! I was looking straight at my own tractor!

I took a deep breath and tried to relax, the way L-83 had said. It helped, because I was able to figure out that the skin of the spaceship was transparent. That is, when you were inside looking out. In fact, practically everything inside was transparent! You remember I said the spaceship was roundish; it was like a flattened rubber ball. Trouble was, what with being able to see through walls and things and the poor lighting system the ship—the whole place was filled with a pinkish fog—it was hard to make anything out clearly.

It's only truthful to admit that I couldn't figure the nature of nearly any of the contraptions lining the different walls. Strangest stuff I'd ever seen; all funny twists and motions.

"That's the control room," L-83 explained, noticing where I was looking. I nodded, and figured that the area next to it was probably sleeping quarters, though I still don't see how a person could sleep comfortably on a bed like that...if it was a bed.

Advising me to stay where I was—as if I dared move!—L-83 floated over to a cluster of grey mounds. He stopped near each one for a moment, then pushed on to the next. I was listening to strange whirring sounds and smelling funny smells—they weren't unpleasant, you understand, just different—and had about given up trying to identify them when L-83 finished his job and swam back to me.

"The analyzers are operating smoothly," he said. "They'll have fin-

ished recording when we get back." I told him I was glad to hear it. The spaceship was beginning to get on my nerves, and I found myself worrying about what the analyzers were supposed to record. I decided not to ask.

"We'd better get started, then," L-83 said briskly, and pushed my shoulder gently, making me float over to what looked like a grey marble, over on the other side of the spaceship from where we'd come in. I was getting the hang of things by this time, so when we arrived at the marble, which turned out to be about ten feet wide, I floated through the white spot on its side without even blinking. L-83 came in behind me.

"No point in taking the entire ship," he told me, busying himself with a bunch of knobs which were clustered in one spot. "This lifeboat will take us to the east coast of your continent fast enough. Just make yourself comfortable and enjoy the scenery."

THIS LIFEBOAT began moving, I went through a white spot which appeared in front of it, and we were outside the spaceship, going upward. The walls were transparent, of course, and I could see the whole farm laid out below us. Everything dwindled; house, barn, silo, even the spaceship, became tiny specks and then disappeared altogether.

We were traveling too fast for me to make out much of the scenery. I saw Chicago, and what I think was Toledo, but I'm not sure. Next thing I knew, we had parked right on top of the United Nations building, with armed guards swarming towards us from every direction!

They couldn't get in, of course, but they crowded around the lifeboat, looking very worried, as if they thought we might be an atomic bomb. L-83 seemed confused. He turned to me, shaking his head, and said, "If this is official center of your world, why should there be armed guards? What is there to be afraid of?"

I started to tell him, but he turned away, mumbling, "Should never have

sent me. H-24 told them the preliminary graphs were startling. Oh, well, orders are orders. Better go to the council chamber and get it over with."

He twirled a knob. A white spot appeared in the roof under us and we sank into it, leaving the guards falling all over themselves to get away from where we were. The spot closed over us.

I was looking upward, admiring the neatness of the ceiling—there wasn't a mark to show where we'd come through—when I realized we'd stopped.

We were hanging about ten feet above the main council chamber's floor. Delegates from every country in the world were scrambling in all directions. For a moment I thought we had come in right in the middle of a free-for-all, then, from the way they were pointing at us, I knew we were the cause of all the ruckus.

L-83 was watching them, still mumbling. "Mustn't stop to integrate now," he was saying. "Important thing is to follow customary procedure exactly. If I deviate from the norm, they'll question all my findings, back at headquarters. Luckily, the language isn't as limited as I feared. Seems to be more than one, in the world were scrambling in all better change my garb."

He slapped the black box again, and, just like that, he was wearing a neat blue pin-stripe business suit! I tell you, he was fast! I had been watching him, but I had no idea of what he did with the overalls and straw hat!

L-83 twirled knobs and we floated over to a pulpit affair where the president of the assembly was. At least, he was there when we started, but he was moving rapidly away when we arrived.

The usual white spot appeared on the side of the lifeboat. L-83 floated through it and I followed, hoping no one would start shooting when we came out. They didn't, everyone being too interested in finding out what we were like. I giggled, thinking about how surprised they'd be, and didn't see the floor coming up to meet my face. I'd become so used

to weightlessness, I had floated out of the lifeboat head first!

L-83 pulled me to my feet, whispering in my ear, "Quick! Introduce me! While they're standing still!"

Groggily, I climbed on a chair and shouted, in my best Grange-meeting voice, "Ladies and gentlemen, I give you L-83, the delegate from outer space, with a message I am sure will be of interest to you all!"

There was no applause, which I thought a little impolite, but everyone seemed to suck in his breath, all at once. L-83 helped me off the chair and said, "Thanks, Pete. I'll take over from here."

HE CLIMBED up on the chair, put his hands on his hips, and looked around the hall. "Mr. President;" he began, "delegates from the United Nations; people of Earth: I bear greetings from the peoples of the Galaxy. A few of your years ago, galactic scientists reported evidence of the use of nuclear power on your planet. As is customary, Galactic Administration on Arcturus VII sent robot observers here to collect on-the-spot information—"

"Flying saucers!" someone from the United States delegation shouted.

L-83 nodded pleasantly to him, and continued. "Their reports indicated that such indeed was the case. There were some confusing items to the effect that your use of nuclear energy was *not* for purposes of greater control of your environment and as a superior power source, but for the purpose of inflicting damage to the surface of your own planet. This was put down to mechanical defects in the robots.

"I was sent here, first, to psycho-examine your race—to discover your Galactic intelligence level, both present and potential—and second, to welcome you into the Association of Galactic Peoples."

He stopped and looked out at the delegates. Would you believe it, there wasn't a sound coming out of any of them!

L-83 ran his hand over his face as

if he were tired, and continued with his speech in a lower voice.

"That's the end of the customary 'Galactic Invitation'. In the case of your planet, however, I'm afraid I'd better add a few more remarks. From what I've learned since my arrival, I've come to understand that the robot reports were not in error. Somehow, you people have managed to combine an amazing mechanical development with a complete lack of the usually concurrent social development. This is a situation without parallel in Galactic history. I don't know what my psych reports will show, and therefore cannot predict the future actions of Administration.

"I want to emphasize, though, that it will probably be necessary for you to give up all means of warfare, forget this thing you call 'National Sovereignty', and undergo an intensive period of social education. Then, perhaps—"

L-83 was drowned out by the angry yells of the delegates. They'd been murmuring louder and louder as he was going through the last part of his speech, and that last remark of his was too much for them.

I couldn't make out much of what they were shouting; too many people were talking at once in too many languages. The Russian delegate shouted something I didn't catch, but L-83, who apparently could understand Russian, heard him. He shouted back, "Nevertheless, the well-being of the galaxy will be considered before any of your local problems!"

The Russian delegate got red in the face and shook his fist, yelling angrily. The American delegate ran over and tugged L-83's sleeve. "The United States has never waged an aggressive war," he bellowed, "but we reserve the right to elect our own leaders, arm our citizens, and protect our shores!"

"Can't you people understand—" L-83 began, when the President of the Assembly started banging his gavel and calling for silence.

It took time, but finally he managed to restore order. Then he turned to L-83 and said, with a slight ac-

cent, "Mr. ah, L-83. The people of the United Nations have received your message. And, while I may say it is odd for a man purporting to come from another world to be wearing an Earthman's business suit—"

I could have told the President that was the wrong thing to say. L-83 frowned, shrugged, and slapped the black box. He was now wearing overalls and straw hat!

"Like this better?" L-83 asked, grinning. One tremendous groan went up from all the delegates. "Or, if you prefer, this is closer to what I'm actually wearing." He had slapped the box again and was dressed in the green cellophane I'd first seen him in.

The President took a firm grip on his gavel and gulped hard. He started talking in a weak voice. "Nevertheless, all of your scientific feats might have been developed right here on Earth. I find it hard to believe that a non-human could look so—so human."

You had to hand it to the President; he had guts. L-83 started to slap the box again, then changed his mind. He said, "The form you see is an illusion, of course, but I don't think you'd enjoy seeing what I really look like!"

The President shuddered. "We'll accept your statements as true," he said heavily, "at least, until the contrary is definitely proven."

He took a deep breath and went on, "Mr. L-83, if people from other worlds wish peacefully to send us ambassadors and trade representatives, we are prepared to show them every honor and courtesy. But—if you try to impose alien customs on our planet by force, Earth will resist to the last man—no matter how overwhelming the odds!"

The delegates burst into wild applause, then stopped short, as if their hands had been cut off, when L-83 made a motion of exasperation. "This whole thing has been a mistake from the start. I should never have delivered a Galactic Invitation to this planet. Now things are getting out of hand. I'll have to take emergency measures!"

He turned to me. "Come on, Pete! It's time we left!"

BEFORE anyone could move, he was through the white spot and into the lifeboat with me close at his heels. L-83 jiggled knobs and we went upward, fast. When we were about fifty feet above the building, the lifeboat came to a stop. For almost a quarter of an hour we hung there, while L-83 twisted knobs, slapped panels, and flicked levers.

I was beginning to get scared, because I expected any minute to see fighter planes come at us, guns blazing, when L-83 straightened up, grinning. "That does it," he said. "I've erased all memory of our visit down there. Only the analyzers back on my ship will show anything."

"What about newspapermen's reports," I asked, "and suppose the session went out over the radio?"

L-83 shrugged. "Don't worry. What I've done has taken care of all of that. And if anything does get out, it will be considered some sort of hoax. Your people tend to put very little faith in each other's words; not that I blame you, considering."

"Anyway, there's nothing to keep us here now. I want to get back to the spaceship and see what those psych reports indicate!"

We went back faster than we had come, and there wasn't even time to talk along the way, supposing L-83 was disposed to talk—which he wasn't.

* * *

It was good to see the farm again. We dipped in over a cloud bank and the lifeboat zoomed into the spaceship like a raindrop hitting a pond.

L-83 dived at the side of the lifeboat and the white spot materialized to meet him. He skimmed across the spaceship like an oversized fish to the grey humps and began to run his hands over the top of the first one he came to. Since he hadn't told me to stay where I was this time, I followed him, traveling a lot slower than he had.

When I arrived at his side, I saw he had the top of the hump open

and was examining some tiny crystals he'd removed from inside it. He had a very unhappy look on his face, and without looking up from the crystals, he shook his head and said, "Bad, Pete, very bad; I hadn't expected the readings would be quite this bad."

"What does it show?" I asked looking over his shoulder anxiously.

He put the crystals back in the grey hump, closed the top, and straightened up wearily.

"Pete," he said, "your people are sick, and it's a terrible sickness you have. I don't quite know how to explain it to you. All the other races of the galaxy have a history different from yours. Once they'd achieved a certain low level of civilization and become the dominant form of life on their planet, they gradually lost their primitive aggressive traits and began to develop the social sciences at about the same speed they learned the physical ones."

He swam back and forth in front of me. I sat huddled on the transparent floor, not daring to breathe.

"Take my race, for example," he went on. "After they'd passed the equivalent of your Late Neolithic Period, there were no wars of any importance on the planet. And the ones that did happen became rapidly less and less frequent and intense. But there is something else. It took your race approximately ten thousand years to go from that period to where you are now. My people—and nearly all the other races of the galaxy—needed almost fifty thousand years of your time to cover the same amount of mechanical development."

L-83 stopped swimming and stared at me. "Do you realize what that means?"

"N-no," I said, becoming even more worried.

"It means two things. First, that your warlike habits made you need ever better weapons, and then, of course, ever better defenses against those weapons. This is an indication of the direction almost all your scientific development has taken, a direction completely alien to that of

the rest of the galaxy. The second thing is even more important. That's what I came back to the ship to check up on. Your race has an amazingly high intelligence potential... one of the highest in the galaxy. But coupled with it, is a tremendous instability."

L-83 sighed, and his face had the saddest expression on it I ever saw. "Do you know what came into the minds of those delegates when our observers—the 'flying saucers'—were mentioned? Do you know the *very first thing* your leaders envisioned?"

I could guess. Yeah, I could guess very well. "Invasion," I said.

L-83 nodded. "Precisely. Every delegate there immediately got a mental projection of warfare, men and women of your race fighting and destroying a great fleet of flying saucers. And they envisioned weapons which you do not have, but which I am sure can—and might—readily be developed. *Not one man considered the possibility of other life-forms being any less warlike than themselves.* That is why Earth is the greatest danger the Galaxy has ever faced."

I gulped; I didn't feel good at all. "What are you going to do about it?"

L-83 shrugged and stared away from me. "I am not sure of the details, of course. Galactic Administration will have to make the final decisions after all my reports have been checked and tabulated. I can predict certain inevitabilities, however: it will be necessary to clamp a tight control on your planet, prevent all possibility of conflict here, and... elimination of all spoiled elements of your race."

"You mean—kill them?"

He thought about that for a while. "In your terms," he said finally, "it will be the equivalent of their being dead. ...Yes, when the 'flying saucers' come back, there will be war—because your orientation has ruled out everything else. Your leaders and their followers will put up a fight, a hard one, I'm sure."

"Listen, L-83," I said, without

much hope. "Why not go away and forget about us? You say you don't want us in your organization: well, can't you just ignore us, then?"

L-83 SWAM over to me and put his hand on my shoulder. I looked in his eyes, and the sadness was still there, but his answer smashed any last shreds of hope I had.

"I'm afraid you can't understand, Pete. Your people are both dangerous and wasteful. Wasteful because, while, from what I glimpsed glancing over the psych reports, there's a good chance humanity—if left alone—might completely destroy itself soon, you'll probably ruin the planet doing it. There are a lot of worthy races scattered around the galaxy, whose suns are dying or whose worlds are overcrowded, who would leap at the chance to populate a planet like this. And do a better job of it, too. Furthermore, a cataclysm on Earth might endanger the struggling young races on Venus and Mercury; they deserve a chance, too.

"And we can't forget about you, as you suggest, Pete. Even if the final graphs show a likelihood of your wiping yourselves out, we couldn't trust the accuracy of our Psychomath in a situation like this. It isn't accustomed to dealing with your type of psychology. If we made a mistake, then in fifty years—the way you're going now—you'd have interstellar travel and be endangering the peace of the entire galaxy. Perhaps, if you were a less capable race—. No. Sorry, Pete, but I'm afraid what I've outlined will be the only possible course of action."

He looked at me for a second without speaking, then said softly. "You'll have to go now, Pete; there's nothing to keep me here, anymore, so I'll be on my way with my reports."

I nodded, turned, and swam awkwardly to the white spot on the outer surface of the spaceship. Carefully, I stepped out onto the grass and stood looking up at the noon sun and drinking in the spring breeze. It was hard to believe it was

the same day I'd been plowing without a care in the world.

The World.

I turned to L-83, who had followed me out of the spaceship.

"What would things be like," I asked, "if we had been...normal?"

He smiled again, more sadly than ever before. "Well, supposing you'd still developed at the rate you did, you would have eliminated illness by this time. Mental illnesses as well as physical ones, of course. Your lives would be perhaps twice as long.

"You'd have put your energies into conquering deserts and waste areas. There'd be no starvation, no poverty, no sections of the race unable to acquire those necessities and luxuries obtainable by other sections. Most important; you'd have sloughed off barbaric customs and ideas. By this time, you'd have been sharing work and pleasure equally, and there would be a minimum of the first and a maximum of the second. You'd have a thorough understanding of yourselves and be living in complete harmony with the universe."

There wasn't much I could say, but I made a last effort. "You know, there have been people who've tried to teach us those things. We do understand the meaning of them. Wouldn't that mean—"

L-83 shook his head. "I know about them. I've learned a lot about humanity since I landed. There are some good qualities in you. That's why I believe it won't be necessary to eliminate you all."

"How—how many will be left, afterwards?" It was the question I'd been afraid to ask.

HE SIGHED. "That's one of the things Administration will decide, after they've analyzed my reports. From what I've seen, however, I'd estimate that not more than ten percent of humanity can be permitted to remain. It might be as little as two percent, though I doubt it. Somewhere within those two figures, in any case. We'll have to eliminate all those who are spoiled and who carry the genes of instability.

Those left will be mostly the very young and such older people as are untainted or can be educated.

"After we finish the elimination process, we'll have the problem of education. It will take years and tax the resources of the galaxy, but it has to be done."

L-83 reached out and shook my hand. "Good-bye, Pete," he said. "I'm sorry, sorrier than I can say. Which reminds me; it's unfair for you to be burdened with the shortcomings of your race. Perhaps I'd better make you forget—"

His left hand moved down to the black box at his side. I raised my hand protesting. "That's not fair L-83! You invited me along: you've no right to tamper with me! Besides, I want to know what's coming so I can prepare for it in my own way. If you don't want me to I won't tell anyone."

He smiled again, looking straight into my eyes. "It won't matter if you talk about it, Pete; no one will believe you. But if you really want to remember, I'll fix it so that you'll remember everything that's happened."

Before I could move, he'd slapped the black box. And—you know—I have remembered everything—even words I didn't understand!

* * *

IT WAS A moment or two before I realized that Pete Billings had stopped talking, before I realized that sometime during the course of his story I'd stopped driving. I was sitting hunched over the steering wheel, clutching it with both hands as if my life depended on it.

My wife, Gwen, let out a long, pent-up breath. I sat up, shaking uncontrollably. I killed the motor and stared past Gwen at the freshly plowed field we'd stopped alongside

of. A full moon had come up. It was a beautiful night.

"When did all this happen?" Gwen asked. I never heard her voice shake that way before.

The young man was gathering his things, preparing to leave.

"Last year—about this time. I don't know how long it takes L-83 to make the trip to wherever he was going and back here, but I don't think there's much time left.

"Thanks for the ride, folks. I'll be getting off here. Think I'll spend the night in the field and head north in the morning. I'd like to see Canada maybe Alaska—if there's time. Good night!"

He got out of the car.

"One more question, please, Pete!" I called loudly, afraid he wouldn't hear. He turned back and put his head through Gwen's window.

"Why are you so worried, Pete? I mean—you seem to be a pretty decent guy, and according to what you said, L-83 seemed to like you. Surely, you won't—"

He turned his eyes away from mine. "After L-83 left, I thought things over and decided to leave the farm, see the country. We had enough money in the bank for Ma to hire someone to take care of things. At least, there'll be enough till—till L-83 gets back. Then it probably won't make any difference, anyway. Poor Ma: she just couldn't understand why I wanted to leave."

Pete Billings turned to face me. That look in his eyes—"You see, I was never too good in school. When L-83 shook my hand and said good-bye...well, it reminded me of the times I'd taken tests and the teacher had tried to avoid my eyes before telling me my mark. L-83 knew—and I knew—that I'd flunked for sure."

THE END



ITERATION

by C. M. KORNBLUTH

The soap opera is here to stay, radio and video versions. Ever consider the possible end-result?

HE PUNCHED IIIAA24 and heard over my bonephone, wincing: "Darling—you're...back!"

I cut the wince short and threw in the life lever. Joe Henderson, standing in the actor's dock, said broodingly: "Yes, dear..." He registered worry, then gallantry and cheerfulness. I threw out the life lever and punched IVTG13, which was a young couple, summer clothes, seen walking into their suburban bungalow.

I could've played that score in my sleep; I don't know how many times the soapies have used it—

I asked you not to interrupt me, damn it! You wanted to know why I ran out and I said I'd tell you—oh, dinner?

What's this stuff—beep—oh, beef? 'S good. Hard on the jaws first time, though—I'll go on with the story.

You want to know why they don't punch it on rolls like a jacquard loom, do you? Once they used to, but even a weaving machine makes mistakes. When there's a mistake they just rip it out and go on. But when the soapies go out—

Their pattern either got punched wrong or the machine slipped or something. So when Old Ma Whiddicomb came into the screen instead of lavender from the grill you got IXWQO9, which is used in stable scenes. And once, on *When a Man Marries Joan's Big Sister* everything was going fine on a big renunciation scene—Joan was giving up David—she kept up a brave



front and walked away smiling. When she turned the corner she was supposed to run for her bedroom and burst into tears, but instead of her bedroom door closing, the machine cut in a shot of a two-holer from *Uncle Eb of Gobbler's Nob*.

That's what the present system evolved out of, and it's foolproof. I took three years at the Rochester Conservatory and did PG at the Juilliard. Give me any score, one with a hundred sets, landscapes, weather, twenty actors in the dock, scents to match everything, mood music changing every two seconds—I can handle it.

Pay is right, brother—didn't catch your name? —how'd'ydo, Mr. Osgood. I got two thousand a month and a pension plan for a twelve-hour week.

Okay, okay—I'm telling you why I ran out. In fact I've told you already. It was that line: "Darling—you're back!"

It's a dramatic convention, I suppose, like the property man in the Chinese theater, or a Chorus in the Greek, or asides in the big tub-thumping Victorian days. If an Athenian Greek didn't have a chorus to explain what was going on he'd feel bewildered and cheated. If the housewife watching a soapie didn't see the heroine say to her husband when he comes home: "Darling—you're...back!" she'd think there

was something wrong and worry about it.

No, don't ask me why they say it. I don't know why a dame who just saw her husband leave for work at ten should register surprise, delight and wonder when he comes back home at fifteen o'clock. They just do, in the soapies.

Anyway, I was telling you about the day before yesterday. In a nice blend of canned shots by me and close-ups by Henderson and his babe we ground our way through the next ten minutes. It was established that Henderson had lost his job because of an inexplicable decline in his efficiency index; he groaned that he was no good and would run out because it would be better that way.

Then we cut to Henderson's mother-in-law and established that she'd slipped him some phenylethylbarbituric acid instead of his vitamins, so he'd lose his job and run out and she could marry her daughter off to a man she had her eye on. Some nice canned stuff in that sequence of her hands opening a capsule and changing the powder in it, all with the appropriate chemical scents.

Cut back to Henderson, making his will before running out. His wife shyly comes in and shows him a tiny identification tag she's been making.

"You don't mean—?" cries Henderson and she lowers her eyes. I step down hard on the benzedrine pedal, throw in the *Hallelujah Chorus*, set up Abstraction 17 for two seconds and cut to the announcer, who's been combing his beard and worrying about a blackhead he just noticed.

"Ladies!" he cries—big smile—"How often lately have you been making the FT?" He lowers his voice, winks a little and coos: "FT, as of course you all know, stands for the famous Cam Brothers Flatulence Test—"

Pete Laurie comes to relieve me on the console and I'm through for the day; I walk out on the Commercial and head for the *Olde Tyme Speake*, down the street.

I DON'T know if any of you are New Yorkers—maybe you know the *Speake*? It's a really quaint place with authentic atmosphere, early twentieth century—old oak rafters and red-leather bar-stools, a rack of shaving mugs, lots of chromium. They have mottoes on the wall from the period—*Landlord, Fill the Flowing Bowl, Nuts to You*, and things like that.

Can I have some more of that beef stuff? I mean *beef*. I'll learn, quit the kidding—I only ran out last night, fella!

Anyway, I met Sam Caldicott at the *Speake*. Could've knocked me over with a feather. We were classmates at Chicago Metaphysical before I went to Rochester. He was going to go in for dietetics or something.

"Hello, Sam!" I said.

"You too," he growled, looking up. "Go to Dachau." He was nasty-drunk, but he finally recognized me. I got him a wake-up and had a buttered rum myself. When the stuff worked on him he apologized and asked me politely what I was doing with myself. I told him I was a soapie consolist; he gave me a funny look.

He had switched from dietetics to psychiatry pretty late and so had had to start learning almost from the beginning again. He'd been in practice only six years, but he said he was doing nicely.

"Well," I said, "If I'm ever tempted to run out I'll give you a ring and you can talk me out of it."

"Are you so sure I would?"

I shuddered at the thought. "If you're any kind of friend, you will; the hell with that Reserve stuff!"

"Ever been there?"

"No," I told him, "and I never will. A bunch of howling barbarians that couldn't stand the gaff, thought they were higher-strung than anybody else—sissies is what they are. They slip back culturally to the twentieth or fifteenth century and they think they're rugged he-men!"

"It could be worse," he said tolerantly. His eyes narrowed as he

seemed to remember something: "I'm treating a woman now—pitiful case; hopeless, I fear. She'd be a hell of a lot better off if she'd been in the Utah Reserve for the past few years."

I gave him some stuff from a talk I'd had with Mr. Administrator Etterson. He'd had it absolutely firsthand that they were practicing human sacrifice in the Reserve. Caldicott just laughed; he simply didn't believe it. I asked him what he meant by that crack about the woman who should have run out. He said he'd show me. I had to get home to my wife, but he got me mad enough to forget about it for the time being. We took a flit to Bronnix, the Morrisania Hospital where he was Resident Psychiatrist.

He warned me outside the patient's room that I'd better keep my mouth shut—the least little thing could send her off into one of her spasms. We went in.

The woman was knitting, her eye on a soapie screen. She turned to us—not bad looking—and said to Caldicott: "Darling—you're... back!" Just like that. Then she registered alarm, apprehension and curiosity and said, batting her eyes at me: "But—won't you...introduce me?"

It was hard to keep from looking around for the ike and the console. I've played and seen that situation a thousand times and now I was meeting it in real life!

"This is my associate," said Caldicott ambiguously. He snapped off the soapie just as Vera Venable, the Alienist's niece, was pleading with Professor Sykes not to fire her uncle from the clinic staff.

The woman went crazy—well, she was crazy, of course, but she began to act it then.

"Turn it on!" she screamed. "You've left poor Vera hanging in the ether! Call her back! Don't leave her out there!"

Caldicott resignedly turned the soapie back on, and the woman said, arching her brows: "Why—thank

you, darling! That was...very sweet!" Running the last two words together and simultaneously lowering her eyes with a shy little smile. The line was another oldie, used several times a day to cover everything from passing an ashtray to a diamond ring.

WE LEFT and went to the hospital refectory.

The refectory soapie screen was on of course, and I was alarmed to find I was alarmed at the number of people who were watching it. Caldicott read my expression, and gave a sour grin.

"She's the first," he said simply.

"Go to Dachau! I don't believe it!"

"You will soon. I tell you, she's the first. There are going to be more—and more—and more."

"Consider: as long ago as the twentieth century there were housewives who never differentiated between real persons and the audio-performers whom they listened to daily. They worried with them, laughed with them, discussed them as though they were absent neighbors. With the slow development of the additional circuits—video, oleo, full-color and tactile for those who like it—the effect was magnified. With the Krebski Formula of the last century, which related the numerical quantities of music to the numerical quantities of the electroencephalogram curves produced by the music, the effect was perfected.

"The housewife of today, frankly, has a soft touch. She dusts, washes dishes, waxes floor and so on by tapping button. With her spare time she watches the soapie screen, and she has a lot of spare time. I've drawn a graph—"

He took out a sheet of paper and smoothed it carefully. I don't pretend to understand such things; I'm a consolist, not a tube-jocky, and I told him so.

"But look," he urged. "Here's the abscissa meaning log-log of number of Caldicott Syndrome cases at one time—"

ITERATION

"Caldicott Syndrome?"

"That's what I call it," he said modestly. "And this red circle indicates where we stand on the time-axis now. You see the rise—"

I finally looked and laughed at what I saw. "You really think," I said, "that the saturation point's been reached?"

"I predicted it a year ago," he said solemnly. "I was actually waiting for the case you just saw to turn up. I believe that there will be five hundred cases tomorrow, two thousand cases the next day, and so on. Pfannkuchen's studies in mass hysteria—"

I got up. "If you're right," I said, "I'll be the first man to run out and join the wild-men in the Utah Re-

serve. But Caldicott, I think you're all wet. That woman upstairs is weak-minded and that's all there is to it. I work with the soapies; I can't believe that any normal person, like my wife, say, could be knocked off the trolley by them. I've got to go now; I'll be seeing you around."

* * *

I left and took a flit for Linden, where I live. Pfannhuchen's studies in mass hysteria, my eye!

But my wife met me at the door and said, with surprise, delight and apprehension: "Darling—you're... back!"

Would you pass me some more of that beef stuff?

THE END

★ Today and Tomorrow ★

We plead "Not Guilty" to the charge of an excessive love for New York, one that makes us select letters from residents of our state for *Down to Earth*. A number of letters in this issue were crowded out which accounts for New York coming up high in the count for a second time; the reason it led in the July issue was simply that, due to deadlines, I could only select from the first comers. With the next issue, I hope more states will be represented—though the letter itself and not the address of the writer gets first consideration.

You'll note that only one story is continued through the back of the book this time; the complaint on several stories having been so folioed seems to me to be just one, and we'll try to avoid that happening again.

With book reviews: first of all, I can only review books sent to me by the publishers; secondly, they'll go in when there's space. This time, there wasn't. I cannot even hope to keep right up with the book publishing schedules; should you see a review in advance of, or only a little

while after, publication it will be a happy accident—one which pleases me as much as anyone else. But we cannot count on it.

For the November issue, George O. Smith is back with a long one, entitled "The World-Mover", dealing with the fascinating results of a very peculiar kind of atomic reaction. It's a wild tale, but I think you'll agree, a very enjoyable one.

James Blish and Damon Knight have collaborated on a novelet, dealing with the first space-ship out from Earth. The travellers encounter another space-ship—yes, I know this has happened before in science fiction—but there is something different about this other ship. The story is not what you would expect from this situation.

There'll be others, good ones from my viewpoint, but I don't want to strain the forecast department. As anyone who's been in this business knows, just the short story you want to rave about is the one which can't be fitted in at the last moment.

RWL

The Long Return

FEATURE NOVEL

by Poul Anderson

(illustration by Murphy)

They were an odd pair, Thornton, the idealist philosopher, and Moss Henry, ship's captain and fighting man. Yet, they both hated war — each in his own way — both dreaded the seemingly inevitable conflict between Earth and Venus. Then the Ancient Race, the long-forgotten Martians, returned from the stars, and Thornton found that his pacifism had doomed both planets to certain destruction . . .

THE MATE, Eisenberg, was on the bridge and saw it first. His voice came over the intercom and rattled against Captain Henry's sleep-walled consciousness: "Spaceship detected. Better come up and have a look, sir."

"Eh—oh—" With an effort, Moss Henry pulled himself out of warmth and darkness. He blinked, focusing his eyes on the dim, crowded cubby-hole which passed for his cabin. "Spaceship—oh, yes. Yeah. I'll be right up."

Momentarily, unbuckling from the stanchions that held him in place against weightlessness, he thought wryly that the use of such terms as "up" and "down" was sheer anachronism. But no matter. There was more urgent business at hand. Another ship, out here in the utter desolation of trans-Neptunian space, meant—well—

He weighed the possibilities with a sudden cold realization that his life might depend on a correct assessment. Neptune itself was a quarter way further on its orbit, so this would not be some supply ship for Triton Colony. In fact, it was highly unlikely to be any Terrestrial craft. There was no reason for merchant vessels to come out here, and with all hell ready to explode in the inner System no navy units would be in outer space. A few would be guarding Neptune, but the

Fleet as a whole would be patrolling around Earth.

That meant—another archeological ship? No, that was definitely out. They were sweeping certain well-defined regions of space, and the nearest one to the *Bolivar* was a good many megamiles off.

So the strange craft was most likely Venusian. Which meant—

"Battle stations!" His voice sounded hollow in the little cabin, but it went roaring over the intercom; he could almost feel the sudden tensing of every man aboard, of the whole ship. "Strange vessel detected. All hands to battle stations!"

There might not be a fight, he thought, scrambling into the worn dungarees which were his closest approximation to a uniform. Every Terrestrial-Venusian encounter did not lead to a skirmish. Sometimes they passed each other in a sullen silence. But too often there would be another "incident", followed by diplomatic protests from either government, inflammatory speeches at home, and the racking up of tension another notch toward the breaking point. Or there might simply be a brief notice in the official journals of one planet or the other that such-and-such a ship was overdue, search parties had found no trace—they rarely did, in the vastness of space—and the ship must be presumed lost. Next of kin have been notified.



"I can see the Venusian fleet, over our cities now."

THIS BOLIVAR was only a small merchant ship, and more than a little obsolete. But she carried guns and space torpedoes, as all ships did these days, and there were a dozen men to man them. For a moment, the thought crossed Henry's mind that the ship could easily get by with a crew of three or four, if it weren't for that possibility of attack. And what the hell was the sense of all this squabbling with Venus? What did it mean for either side but death and ruination and needless expense?

He pulled himself out of the cabin by the handholds and gave a shove that sent him rapidly down the corridor toward the bridge. As he came to the companionway, he collided violently with Thornton.

"Hell!" snarled Captain Henry. "Get out o' the way!"

Bradley Thornton stiffened. The archeologist was tall and lean and gray, with long, thin-chiseled features burned dark by years under the acrid sun of Mars. Henry knew vaguely that he came of one of Earth's old and wealthy families. Insofar as Earth had an aristocracy these days, Thornton belonged to it. Which hadn't improved relations between the two men; Henry had begun as a Negro stevedore in the Terraport slums.

"Captain," said Thornton coldly, "I represent the Terrestrial Archeological Institute, which hired this ship with the understanding that I retain the final authority."

"You moron, this is an emergency! If that's a Venusian ship—"

"Then you may have the command." The way he said it, Thornton relegated Venusian ships to the category of work suitable for the lower classes. "But—I don't think it is, Captain Henry."

"What—"

"We'll see!" Thornton led the way "up" the companionway.

They came onto the bridge, and the tremendous star-blazing dark of space swam before their eyes. Eisenberg looked up from the oscilloscope of the detector. His voice held puzzlement and a dim fear, as if the cold outside had reached through

and touched his heart. "She—it's coming in almighty fast, sir," he said. "And—not in the ecliptic plane. From about forty degrees north of it—"

Henry heard Thornton draw a sudden gasping breath, and saw the archeologist's eyes light with a sudden incredulous triumph. For an instant the captain hung wondering in midair. He had never seen such a light in a man's face before.

But there was work to do, no time to lose; he shoved his stocky form over to the instrument board and glared at the dials.

The signal on the oscilloscope wavered before his eyes, dancing, blurred by cosmic interference. But no doubt of it, the radar was reporting a considerable metallic mass approaching from—well, approaching the sun from somewhere else. Somewhere out of the ecliptic plane—

He looked up at Thornton, and realization came slowly to him. But he should have known it, he should have known it. He said quietly: "You knew this was coming."

"Yes—yes—but I didn't dare hope our ship would be the one to—Quick, man, quick! Intercept it!"

Automatically, Henry's attention shifted back to the instruments. The continuously recording tape of the detector held already enough data to work out the thing's orbit with fair accuracy. The radar time-signal gave the component of the stranger's velocity in this direction, and from the rate of angular shift it was easy to calculate the orthogonal component. Then if you assumed that the course was a straight line—which would, out here so far from the sun, be very nearly true—you could plot a trajectory for yourself which would intersect that of the other craft and match velocities—Henry's fingers danced over the computer keys. Almost absently, he spoke into the intercom: "Stand by to accelerate."

There was no word between him and Thornton until the *Bolivar* was leaping forward at a gravity and a half. Then Henry sat back and got out a stubby pipe. "We'll make con-

tact in about ten hours," he said. "Assuming, of course, that they don't take evasive action. And now, Doctor Thornton, would you mind telling me what in the hell this is all about?"

THORNTON smiled wryly. "To tell the truth," he said, "I'm not too sure myself. But—well—maybe I'd better lead up to it gradually. Because this is perhaps the greatest moment in the history of the Solar System."

"I should think the first visit from outside would be," Henry's voice fell as low as Thornton's in the awe of that instant. His eyes dropped from the bitter white blaze of stars spilling across the sky, down to the wavering, pulsing signal on the oscilloscope. For a moment, it seemed to be tracing cabalistic signs, hieroglyphs of some unknown unhuman language whispered across the universe. Outside, outside, the terror of utter emptiness and strangeness, twenty-odd trillion miles of cold and dark and vacuum to the next nearest sun—fear clutched at him and his big work-scarred hands gripped futilely against the arms of his chair.

And he was here on the very borders of that infinity, with Sol no more than the brightest of that arrogant host of stars, too remote from the next nearest humanity for rendezvous with the unknown power—a feeble radio voice—cut off, alone against the universe, sweeping to a rendezvous with the unknown powers of Outside.

Well—he gathered himself, raised a wall of solid practicality between himself and the blind terror of infinity, and let the muscles loosen in his arms and belly and heavy shoulders. His broad blunt face turned to challenge Thornton's gray eyes, and his voice lashed savagely at the almost religious ecstasy in the other man. That was no mood in which to face the cosmos—damn it—that thing out there was from far away but it wasn't from beyond death, a man could handle it.

"Obviously," he said, "the Insti-

tute was expecting this ship. Has been expecting it for years, in fact, and hiring merchant craft to patrol outer space, to meet it when it came. But the government don't know about it—I checked on that, when you approached me with your contract, and they said as far as they knew you were only after relics of the old Martian space traffic. Which didn't make too much sense to me, but it seemed an easy way to make money. But—you must've had powerful backing, to hire that many ships and men. Somebody big was behind you. And what I want to know now is—who?"

"The Institute is an old and well-established organization, with adequate resources," said Thornton coldly. "I don't mind adding that certain of its members are wealthy and subscribed large amounts of money for this project. But I am not required to say more."

"Oh, yes, you are; I'm captain here—"

"Your contract—"

"I know space law as well as you do, Dr. Thornton. Maybe a little better." Henry grinned mirthlessly, a white gleam of teeth in the darkness of his features. "I had quite a few contacts with it, while I was fighting up through the ranks. And in an emergency, the captain is captain; contracts don't count."

SEEING the archeologist's hostile stiffening, he went on rapidly, "I am not unreasonable, Dr. Thornton. I'm glad to cooperate with any legitimate and sane undertaking. But I must know what it is first."

"I did not intend to conceal it from you," said Thornton. It was plain he would much have preferred to sit in rapt contemplation of this great moment. "The Institute, through its researches on Mars, has come into the possession of certain knowledge so important that the future of the Solar System may depend on it—knowledge far too great to be trusted to the militaristic morons who run the government of Earth. Accordingly, we have chosen

to act privately, meet this ship as individuals rather than regulation-bound representatives of officialdom, and base future action on the result of that meeting. To put it briefly—"

The meteor alarm buzzed. After a second, the buzz changed to the high-pitched whine which meant that the object detected was probably a ship.

Thornton's voice trailed off into blankness. Henry leaned forward over the instruments, reading, computing. There was silence on the bridge, a taut quivering silence in which the noise of engines and air circulators were meaningless vacuum behind that drumhead skin of quiet. Outside, the Milky Way gleamed frostily around the arc of the heavens.

When Henry looked up, his face was as if cast in dark iron, and his voice was cold and colorless: "Another ship, on an accelerated path which should intersect ours about the same time as we meet the outsider. Only—this one's moving in the ecliptic plane too, from Sunward. Did you have anyone set to meet us, Thornton?"

"No," whispered the archeologist. "No one."

"It's Solar, all right," nodded Henry grimly, "and I'm pretty damn sure that if it isn't one of yours it won't be Terrestrial at all.

"Which means—Venusian!"

2

WHEN THE frantic scurrying and preparing were over and the *Bolivar* was crouched into alertness, a bleak waiting for the slow hours to end and the inevitable meeting to take place, Henry found himself alone on the bridge with Thornton. There was little for anyone to do while the many miles were devoured. Eisenberg had gone down to the engine room to make certain preparations with Olsen, and only the captain and the passenger sat looking out at the stars now.

"Oh, luck, luck, luck." A tormented bitterness rode Thornton's voice. His eyes were desperate "That this should happen, in the greatest moment of history—that man's last chance for sanity should be lost by blind accident—"

"I wonder just how accidental," murmured Henry, studying the flickering oscillograph. "A Venusian wouldn't just happen by; space is too big. I have a hunch that he was waiting, too."

"He couldn't have been! No one, no one in the Solar System knew this except for a select group within the Institute and a few other scientists whom we could trust."

"Well—you still haven't told me what this mysterious 'it' is, Thornton," said Henry. "I'm waiting."

"I—well—" The archeologist fumbled with a cigaret, groping for words. "It's a very long story. It goes back ten thousand years, really, to the last dying Martians. But it was Blakiston who found the record, ten years ago... Have you ever been on Mars, Captain Henry?" At the spaceman's disgusted scowl, he added hastily, "Of course you have. But I don't mean Aresport or Dry-gulch or any of the other new colonies, Terrestrial or Venusian. They aren't Mars. The planet—its soul is out in the deserts, in the ruins and the graves and the inscriptions. Have you ever visited them?"

"A little."

Henry remembered those trips, over the rusty desolation of a dead world, to the huge silence of those incredible works. Some said that the golden age of Mars had been a hundred thousand years ago. For a thousand centuries, those lovely fluted columns had stood under the dark greenish sky; for a thousand centuries wind and sand and the slow rusting out of the planet's heart had eaten at them, and still they seemed almost alive. He remembered the vivid murals, the vaulted temple choked with blowing sand, the exquisite fragment of a golden brooch worn thin as paper by erosion... and now there were only the desert and the tumbled ruins and the

strange light-boned skeletons...yes, he remembered!

"The last Martians must have died ten thousand years or so ago," said Thornton. "It was too much for them. For millennia they had been fighting a losing way with the drying and cooling of their world, the exhaustion of the soil, the attenuation of the atmosphere, the whole despair and hopelessness of it. Their once-mighty civilization was crumpled to savagery, only a few refugees remained for the ancient learning... But to the end, they had a few spaceships. They must have visited neolithic Earth and Venus, seen how unexpectedly rapid progress was. You do know that there was a great burst of inventiveness on both planets about that time, such fundamental inventions as the ship and the wheel being produced—"

"I know it now," said Henry.

"The Martians guessed that perhaps these seemingly inferior life-forms were actually their betters in inherent skill. After all, the Martian race was not technologically inclined. Their science was so great, greater even than ours today, simply because their culture was so enormously older. Anyway, those last Martian visitors must have foreseen that Earth and Venus would be traveling between the planets, perhaps even before the—the event which is now on us. So—they left word for us.

"You know of the New Karnak Stones?"

"Ummm—yeah, a little. Found about fifty years ago, weren't they? Held the key to the Martian written language—"

"That's right. A key obviously designed for alien philologists. It started with a purely ideographic script, which can be deciphered. Then it gave the equivalents in the regular Martian alphabet. It took years of work, on the part of Le-Clerc and others, but the riddle was finally solved. Today, those who care to learn can read the old Martian writings. In fact, thanks to the alphabet's being phonetic, they can speak the language!"

"So—?"

"It was an immense help to archeology, of course, and until Blakiston's find ten years ago it was thought that the Martians had left that key simply as an altruistic gesture, or perhaps to save the memory of their race from total oblivion. But then, in the ruins of one of those last civilized communities, he found the inscription which revealed their true purpose."

HENRY remained silent. The ship whispered around them, driving through a night of bitter stars.

"It was an appeal," said Thornton softly. "I won't quote the whole of it—it was very long—but it said in part: *We have seen the races of the inner planets rising, more swiftly than we ever thought possible, and have stood dumb before their supreme skill in mastering the world about them. They have done in centuries what took the folk of Mars thousands of years. Yet they are young, these races, young; they will grasp the powers of gods with the hands of children, and we have stood appalled before their utter savagery and heedlessness. They are hard and cruel and reckless. They have it in them to conquer the stars—but will they ever conquer themselves?*

"Yet there are wise ones among them, beings with the slow deep patience of the thinker, dreamers who know that murder breeds its like and that in the end only the mind and the soul can bring peace to the body. Only that breed will have the patience to learn our language, so foreign to them. Only these few will be able to read this last message. And—we pray that they will have the sense to keep the secret, to use it as they see fit—for only they know what is for the best.

"*Into your hands, stranger from a strange world, we give the future.*"

Henry said nothing. He fiddled with his pipe, embarrassed by the emotion that quivered in Thornton's voice.

The archeologist looked at him for

a long moment. Then he sighed, wearily, and said: "The inscription told the story of what had happened some five thousand years earlier. At that time, Martian civilization was declining, but still not too far from its peak. They knew what was coming. They could see the slow planetary death awaiting them. There was no other planet in the Solar System to which they could hope to move, and, lacking as I said the essentially dynamic attitude of Earthly technology, they did not have much hope of saving the home world. But they had to save the race.

"You can guess what happened. They built three giant spaceships, the greatest ships that history had ever seen, and they loaded them with colonists and supplies, and sent them blindly out among the stars to look for a new planet."

HENRY NODDED, slowly, slowly. He had been expecting the revelation. He looked down to the signal pulsing on the oscilloscope, and out to the swarming blazing stars, and sought one mote of thin light among them. "The Martians are coming back."

"Aye." Thornton nodded. "The colonists were to go out in these mighty ships, traveling very nearly at the speed of light, and look for a world like Mars, but one younger, more habitable. They would never come back. It would not be practicable to ferry immigrants from Sol—besides, all the energies of the race would be needed for the gigantic attempt, which might after all succeed, to rebuild at home. But this fragment of the species would certainly be saved.

"And it was agreed that they would send an expedition which was to arrive at a certain time, some fifteen thousand Terrestrial years after the emigrants had departed."

Henry whistled. "Fifteen thousand years! That's a hell of a long time!"

"Yes. But after all, it would take them an enormous time to find a world. It had to be definitely safe, definitely habitable. And, Martian

morality being as high as it was, there could be no indigenous race which would have to be ousted. Once such a planet had been found and settled, it would take time for the colony to become established, time for its population to grow so far that there was no doubt of the species' having survived beyond all chance of random extinction. And then there would be the trip back itself, which might take centuries of time as measured outside the ship.

"And, too, the Martians had a different attitude toward time from ours. Their civilization was already at least half a million years old, and it was more stable than ours; it lacked our frantic desire and need for change. Progress was slow, very slow... In fact, the Martian mentality is so alien to ours that even I, who have spent my life studying it, know only how far I am from understanding.

"In any case, the Martians were to return at about this time. To return to their old home, their own people—or to the graves of their race. To return with all the powers of a science already beyond ours, a science that has since had fifteen thousand years to grow. But—those Martians will not be expecting to find Earth and Venus ruling the Solar System. They'll look for us still to be savages. As we are, Captain Henry, as we are—but mechanized savages, immensely dangerous barbarians.

"And how the Martians will react—now—only God knows."

"And you didn't tell anyone?" Henry's eyes were incredulous, searching Thornton's in bafflement, fear, and a dawning rage. "You kept it secret?"

"As the Martians asked," said Thornton quietly; "it was their last appeal, and we have heeded it.

"Just suppose they were to be met by the fleet of battleships Earth would send out if its government knew. They would be frightened, suspicious, ready to fight or flee. Then some pompous red-necked admiral would tell them that Mars was now a colony of Earth, in spite of

claims by those damned Venusians, and that the ruins of the Sun Pyramid had been leveled to build a rocket port. He would welcome them to the Solar System they once ruled, and would ask them please to come aboard so a Terrestrial prize crew could take their ship to Luna Base. He would demand from them all their knowledge, to be used in murdering Venusians, and would threaten them with prison or hypnoquizzing when they refused. He would speak of human destiny among the stars, an Empire of Sol including, perhaps, the Martians' new planet—

"The militarists would degrade this discovery as they have perverted the atom and the spaceship and the electronic brain. Or else—they would fail; they would provoke the Martians into unleashing all their fantastic arsenal on us—or simply into leaving the System, leaving us to our one little sun and the darkness of our own ignorance and cruelty.

"No, Henry—we decided long ago that the Martians must be met by that breed of men to whom they had appealed, by scientists and philosophers, by men who believe that violence is not an answer to anything. Men who could explain to them how the situation was, appeal to them for help—get their knowledge and wisdom and power to end this miserable struggle with Venus in a peace just to both planets. It is the only way."

Henry stirred restlessly. His wide mouth curled. "So—you're a pacifist," he said slowly.

"Yes. And I am proud of it."

"It's your right to be, I suppose; but I've known too many men and Venusians who needed killing."

"The sort of attitude I would have expected from you."

"Anyway," said Henry bitterly, "your wonderful scientific cleverness hasn't had much more result than throwing us against a probably more powerful Venusian ship which now has a chance to take over both us and the Martians. I can see the Venusian fleet over our cities now. Tell me, Dr. Pacifist Thornton, is a Venusian navy man less militaristic than your red-necked

Earthling? Or maybe you've never seen a Venusian torture ceremony?"

3

THE SHIP was visible to the naked eye now, frighteningly visible against the cloudy glory of the Milky Way, and radio beams were hunting up and down the spectrum in frantic search of a voice.

A voice, a face, a flicker of recognition out of the dark and silence of fifteen thousand years—but the ship was silent. The Martians were silent.

Henry's eyes roved from the ship to his instruments and back again, prowling a path of numbed fascination. Ye gods, it must be huge! A five-mile cylinder, a mile in diameter, sheening faint gold in the dim bitter light of stars and nebulæ and the far tiny sun, wrapped in some inexplicable halo of vague blue shimmer, it held otherness in its every line and curve and sweep of incredible mass. A tingle of fear shivered along his spine, he felt a crawling germ of panic in the face of the utterly unknown stir within him and throttled it fiercely.

Thornton gave him a cold look. "You're afraid," he said.

"I—don't entirely like it," admitted Henry slowly. "The powers they may have—"

"You're afraid. You're afraid of the new and strange and wonderful. You're attributing our own childish murderousness to them, and so you fear them. When you could meet them as a friend!"

"I wonder... But one thing's for damn sure; we aren't going to meet that Venusian as any friend. It'll be here inside half an hour, and there isn't much we can do about it." The *Bolivar* shuddered in another rocket blast, groaning with the strain of matching velocity to the Martian. The two vessels sped on parallel Sunward tracks, a hundred miles apart, and the *Bolivar's* radio beams flickered and questioned and waited for a reply out of humming silence.

"Strange—" Henry looked at his

instruments, got out his slide rule, and nodded at the answer. "That thing has a fantastic mass. But—for its size, fantastically low. Damn it, unless my gravito-meter and slip stick are both liars, that big hull must be over ninety percent empty!"

"Perhaps—" Thornton's guess was not completed. There was a buzz from the ship's main televiser—a call on the standard FM band. For a moment the two men were galvanized with an incredible hope, but it faded as Henry shook his head and opened the receiving channel.

"Could only be the Venusian," he said.

THIS SCREEN flickered to life with a face that bore out his statement. For a moment Thornton's attention was held by the gaudy uniform covering the big green-skinned body; the elaborate dazzle of gold and jewelry; even the anachronism of a long, curved sword. He remembered that the Venusians had been behind Earth, technologically and socially, when the first visits were made. They had caught up in scientific achievement with an almost frightening speed, driven perhaps by some desire to prove their own superiority to the strangers from beyond the sky; but their society was still almost feudal, dominated by the great aristocratic families and a tradition regulating even the smallest details of life.

But there was nothing stupid or ignorant about the lean hairless features and the arrogant dark eyes that looked into theirs. Save for the bony crest on the bald skull, and the green skin and lack of external ears, it could have been the face of some Terrestrial leader, shrewd and strong and ruthless.

He spoke in the near-perfect English which was required knowledge for all Venusian officers: "Imperial Zamandarian cruiser *Xiucuayotl*, Commander Uincozuma speaking, calling Terrestrial spaceship *Bolivar*."

"Terrestrial spaceship *Bolivar*, Captain Henry speaking," replied the man automatically, and then in sud-

den realization: "You—know what ship this is!"

"Of course." The Venusian's face split in a steely smile. "The intelligence services of Zamandar are not staffed by utter fools, Captain Henry. When we learned that an ostensibly private organization was maintaining a costly patrol in outer space, it was only natural to assume that those ships would bear watching."

"But—" Thornton came forth into the scanner area. "But—a private archeological research project—"

"Surely your government did not expect anyone on Zamandar to believe such a feeble story," said Uincozuma contemptuously.

Henry smiled thinly at Thornton. "You'll never change his conviction," he said. "A planet where everything is controlled by a ruling class, among which intrigue is the normal order of things, would never take a statement such as that at face value. So it seems that regardless of your desire to meet—them—unofficially, we'll still have to represent all Earth!"

"And now—" Uincozuma leaned forward until his stiff countenance seemed to project from the screen, his strong presence to fill the bridge—"now, Captain Henry and gentlemen, what is the identity of that ship? Where is it from? How did you know when it was due—or even that it was coming at all?"

"Our secret—" began Thornton.

"Nonsense!" The metal voice shivered in the telescreen with its violence. "You are a merchant ship, feebly armed at best and manned by civilians. This is a cruiser of the Imperial navy. Conduct yourselves accordingly.

"If necessary, I will not hesitate to blow you out of the sky and deal directly with the stranger. But—"

The screen flickered and buzzed with interference. The excited voice of the *Bolivar*'s radioman came over the intercom: "Sir, there's another signal. The strange ship is calling us—"

"At last!" Thornton gasped the words, and Henry saw the hope in his eyes. Perhaps even now—

Uincozuma smiled, grimly. "This should be an interesting conversation," he said. "You might as well arrange for a three-way hookup, Captain Henry. I'll be listening anyway."

Thornton laughed, shakily. "Go ahead," he challenged, "and may you get joy of it."

Henry brought the auxiliary tele-screen around in such a manner that it scanned the *Bolivar's* bridge, including the main screen with Uincozuma's face. His hand shook a little as he turned it on. After fifteen thousand years—

THIS FACE grew into the screen, and he knew that it was Martian. It was the face that had looked out of the old murals in New Thebes one unforgotten day when he had been there. Henry remembered the faint chill he had felt then as he comprehended the age of that painted face, for fifty thousand years the painter had been dust and still those strange golden eyes had looked out over the iron deserts and watched a planet die. And now, before him, it was the same undying countenance, beautiful and ageless and unhuman, and its blind stare had become fierce and alive, and it spoke to him.

It was an avian face, with a long curved beak reaching out from the narrow skull, a long slim neck down to the half manlike body which sat wrapped in a red cloak. A smooth white coat of feathers covered the Martian, flaring into a shining blue crest on his head—the whole being, face and body, had a stark simplicity which was somehow utterly awesome and beautiful. It was the eyes that held him most, the great golden eyes with fire smoldering and swirling behind them, he could not meet that terrible gaze for long at a time.

He thought, briefly, of the unbelievable ages of civilization behind that being, of a journey across a waste of light-years to find an empty planet and back to find the homeland, of powers and wisdom beyond his guessing—and it seemed only right that this one who faced him should

be thus. He imagined, vaguely, that a god might look something like that.

Uincozuma's amazed oaths faded into silence, and the Venusian regained the aristocrat's iron self-possession. Glancing at him, Henry could almost see the brain whirring at top speed behind that impassive visage. The nobles of Zamanda could be disturbingly keen—and Uincozuma commanded an armed cruiser.

His attention turned back to Thornton. The archeologist was crouched before the screen, tensed to the breaking point, and a devouring ecstasy lit his whole being. This was the culmination of ten years' work and waiting and hope; he faced the stranger from the stars and it was now he who might carry destiny. It was almost a religious feeling, and Henry scowled. His own hard practicality was returning to the spaceman; mysticism was no attitude just now.

The Martian spoke, a rippling, clicking flow of syllables, like a brook running over stones, with here and there a guttural singing or a high thin whistle, the language of birds. Thornton nodded. "It's the old language," he said. "The crew of this ship learned it, as a tongue they would have in common with Mars—or more likely the colonists never abandoned it. It's a perfect language, in its way—"

He answered the Martian, slowly, shaping his tongue and throat to sounds never meant for human utterance. Briefly the Martian started, obviously amazed, and then lapsed into his statuesque immobility, the quiet of an eagle on its perch.

Henry could not even distinguish many of the sounds, but he could guess at what was said. *Welcome, welcome back to the Solar System.*

You are not—of our race.

No, we are of the inner planets, we are younger than you. Your own world died long ago, long ago, your people are dust on the lonely desert wind, you have had your long journey across space for nothing—but welcome, welcome home!

"Henry. Captain Henry."

THE SPACEMAN turned at the voice, to meet Uincozuma's bleak gaze. "There is no longer any need for you to attempt concealment," said the Venusian. "It is perfectly obvious what happened. The dying Martians sent out a few colonists to some other star. Their descendants were to return at a certain time, and your archeological society found the records telling of that return. So you kept it secret, meaning to deal with the Martian's for the benefit of Earth. But I am here now; I can deal too."

"Without speaking their language?" jeered Henry.

"There are other ways. Let the Martians but come to Venus, and we have our own scientists who can talk to them."

"But not out here!"

"No. However—the Martians will certainly try to communicate with me, somehow, as well as with you. After all—your race is just as foreign to them as mine. If everything else fails—I still command a warship!"

Henry looked out the port. The *Xiucuayotl* was visible to the naked eye now, a thin metal sliver splashing bright flames of rocket jets across the sky. He had seen the sleek deadly vessels of her class at close range, he knew how hopelessly more powerful she was than the *Bolivar*. If Uincozuma could deal directly with the Martians, even if the Martian ship stayed neutral in any battle, the Earthlings might as well not be here.

If on the other hand the Martians could be persuaded to side with the *Bolivar*, their own immense powers—But did they have any? That monster craft didn't look like a warship—anyway, according to Thornton they hadn't come expecting to find the younger races advanced beyond a barbaric state. Even if the *Xiucuayotl* had to fight the Martian vessel, she might still be the winner, Uincozuma might still take his prize and his captives back to Venus.

And the Martian technology—oh, God, what must they not know! Even back in that age when they were still in the System, they had

known things at which modern science only guessed. The records told of disintegrant beams, control of gravity, chain reactions which could wrap a whole planet in flame. Not enough apparatus had survived to teach latter-day science much—and if now that power were thrown into the balance—

4

THORNTON turned back to face Henry and the image of Uincozuma. "He wants to talk to all three of us," said the archeologist. "He wants me to interpret. I'll do it, of course—whatever is said." His eyes challenged both the captains.

"Good," said the Venusian. "Bid him welcome in the name of Imperial Zamandar—"

"I took that for granted," said Thornton dryly.

"—and ask him who he is and what his errand, that we may best assist him," finished Uincozuma smoothly.

"He has already told me. As nearly as I can render the names, he is Herakon, *phryon*—that's only approximately equivalent to 'captain'—of the ship *Delphis* from the planet Kiaros. And, of course, he is here with his fellows on the long-planned visit to the Solar System. They are peaceful scientists and 'other citizens'—whatever that phrase means—who desired only to make contact with their fellow Martians or, since these are no longer living, to visit their graves and get some relics for the new world." Thornton frowned a little. "By all we know of Mars, from the records, the race has always had an extremely devout regard for the past and its physical remains. They may not like the fact that we—Earth and Venus—have left the ruins unrestored, and removed much of the old works and even bones to our museums, and built blatant new structures all over the old deserts."

"How could two young races be expected—dead aliens—" Henry caught his temper. This was no time to jet off; now, if ever, the desperate

need was for cool and careful and hard-boiled thinking. With the Martians, of Lord knew what powers and intentions, and the Venuians, whose strength and purpose were all too plain, catastrophe loomed for all Earth unless—

Thornton gave him a cold look. "I daresay the Martians will allow for the immaturity of our races," he said. "But sometimes it is necessary to punish children."

"Damn it, man, it isn't right to try and look at your own race from outside that way. It's *Earth*—mankind—"

"The usual slogans by which the militarists gain the witless allegiance of fools. I did not choose my race, Captain Henry, but I did choose my allegiance—to the ideals of peace and sanity. If, as I think, the Martians are closer than Earth or Venus to those ideals, then the Martians are my people."

Henry half opened his mouth, and snapped it shut again. You couldn't argue with a fanatic, and they needed Thornton. As long as he was the only one who could talk to the Martians, they needed him.

The archeologist was conversing with Herakon again. Henry turned away from the flow of unhuman syllables with something of a shudder. It was almost with a feeling of relief that he faced Uincozuma's cold strength and the understandable problem that the Venusian represented. "What're we to do?" he asked.

THREE WAS a certain sympathy, but no comfort, in the steely reply: "Whatever circumstances dictate. In a way, it simplifies matters that your archeologist is on the Martian side—assuming that they want him! Otherwise, the best thing might have been for me to destroy your ship and try to get the Martians to accompany me—they would understand some sort of sign language or picture writing, I suppose. But as it is—we shall see."

"We both represent Sol in a way, Uincozuma. Couldn't we make some kind of working truce to deal with these strangers? They aren't really

Solarian any longer. Their real interests lie in whatever new system they inhabit."

"Earth and Venus can only agree against Kiarios if it proves equally hostile to both. But if there is any faintest chance that the Martians—Karians, if you like—can be persuaded to help either of our planets—if only to the extent of giving us any of their scientific knowledge—then, of course, it is my duty to see that Venus gets that help. If the Martians want to help you, I shall have to destroy you and try to destroy or capture them—at the very least, destroy you and run Sunward till I can get in radio range and call the Imperial fleet to my aid. If on the other hand the Martians choose to help me—why, then I must capture or destroy you anyway, to keep you from carrying the news back to Earth." There was no personal hostility in the cool statement, but neither was there any pity. Mercy was no consideration whatever with the Venusian aristocracy.

Henry turned to Thornton. "You see," he began angrily, "that's the sort of thing the 'red-necked admirals' you despise are protecting us against. If it weren't for our 'militaristic morons', Earthlings would have been serfs to Venusian overlords twenty years ago. If you can wrap yourself in your own smug virtuousness and let that sort of thing happen to men and women and children who never gave anyone any offense—"

"How about Venusian males and females and young?" snapped the scientist. "They weren't hurting anyone either, but they've died in the 'border incidents'; they don't want to knuckle under to our military commanders and plantation owners any more than we want—Oh, shut up, anyway." He turned back to Herakon. The Martian sat wrapped in his cloak of silence, watching them. Henry thought of old, vaguely remembered myths, Osiris weighing the hearts of the dead in the Hall of Judgement. And what was the Martian thinking now behind those eyes of molten gold?

He grew aware that Herakon was talking again and that Thornton was translating into English, almost unconsciously, as an aid in guiding his own mind through the intricacies of the ancient language. He listened, and Uincozuma listened, and save for that lilting, fluting flow of un-human words and the low-voiced, stumbling human tongue, there was silence on the bridge, the silence of space.

"—far and far they went, ever seeking, and suns bloomed out of the great dark and faded behind them, and never was there the world they sought. Many and strange were the planets they left behind them, much did they see and learn in those centuries, but home became a myth to them, a hopeless racial dream. A few, a very few planets they found which were as their longings, but these all bore intelligent life of their own, and our ancestors would no more than we displace the rightful owners of a land were that the Lost Country itself."

"And you never fought a war?" asked Uincozuma softly. Thornton scowled, but put the question into Martian. The great beaked head nodded, slowly.

"Twice have we fought, in all the long time since Mars was young. Once on our way between the stars, we found a system wherein were three races, and one of these was utterly evil. It was a race of carnivores which had murder in their hearts as an instinct; they had fought each other in devastating wars, driven by what seemed a need of combat, until they reached the other planets. Then they forgot their quarrels in the rush on their defenseless neighbors. One race they had enslaved, when our ancestors arrived, and the other they had condemned to death because it would not yield; only a few gallant remnants of it fought on. Our ancestors recoiled in horror, but they had a plain duty. The surgeon does not hesitate to destroy a billion lives of disease germs to save the life of one intelligent being. They used their knowledge and the world-smashing

power of their ships to help the two attacked races, and they wiped out every last one of the enemy species before leaving that system. It was a hard and cruel thing to do, but the universe is a cleaner place for it.

"Then once again we fought, some centuries after the landing on Kiarios, when the natives of another star came conquering. These were not so evil as the earlier aggressors, but they were dangerous and they wrought great damage ere we mobilized our powers. Here again we resolved on extermination, simply as a safeguard for the future." The metallic yellow eyes blazed with cold pride. "No race has a right to pick a fight, but it has a right to guard itself against potential wars by the most appropriate means. Kiarios sent a fleet to the enemy's home planet and unleashed the atomic fire. That world will still be a white blaze a hundred thousand years from today. It will be a beacon warning the warmakers in the cosmos to let Kiarios be!"

THE MARTIAN made an impetuous gesture with one clawlike hand, and a blank stillness descended. Henry fought for control. Fear, it was fear that crawled along his spine and shrieked in his brain, a fear less of personal death than of the extinction of all which had made him, the death of Earth and mankind. Earth, Earth, the blue skies and the rolling hills and the broad wild seas—was Earth to stand in one lurid blaze because the Martians decided that Earthlings were evil?

We are, in a way. Both we and Venus have sinned beyond redemption by Martian standards in our silly, bloody wars, in our childish grasping for political and economic power, in the—simply in the potential menace to Kiarios which we represent. The Martians are not aggressive like us, but they are utterly ruthless. To safeguard themselves, or even to vindicate an abstract moral principle, they would not hesitate to blow up the Sun.

Herakon was speaking again, in answer to some question of Thorn-

ton's: "Aye, we found our world at last, and it was worth every second of the bitter, weary centuries, it was like Mars come young again, green and fair and alive, with seas that sparkled in the sun and mountains that reached for the sky. And no strangers walked over the wide windy plains or flew through the fair skies, it was a lonely world—it was our own. We had come home.

"So we landed on Kiarios, strange planet of a strange sun five hundred light-years from Sol, and the wanderers—or their children or grandchildren—felt it was more their home than the barren deserts of Mars had ever been. And that was more than thirteen thousand years ago, and they have been there ever since.

"It was hard at first, bitterly hard. Our species is not by nature given to pioneering, physical or technological; only in art and philosophy do we feel free to make the great bold advances which are the justification of intelligence. But we have, at least, the will and the strength to survive.

"And over the centuries we built out culture anew, and slowly we even learned what our ancestors had not known, and we perfected ourselves and our achievements. Today we hold the system of Kiarios in a perfectly balanced civilization. Nothing can ever go wrong internally; we can endure forever, and in our own way we are happy."

(Thornton raised a puzzled face. "I can't quite translate that," he whispered. "That phrase—well, it doesn't really mean 'happy' or 'contented' or 'successful' or any other state that might make sense to an Earthling or a Venusian. It means the Martian equivalent, but that is something unimaginable to us, a state which is, in its own way, dynamic—but wait." He turned back to the speaking Martian.)

EERAKON continued. "But there was an ancient promise made, and it had to be fulfilled. The completion of our task required a full cycle, a return to the descendants of our ancestors—or their graves. A young race, which has not that feel-

ing of kinship with an immense and overwhelmingly great past, cannot realize what a basic need that is. And so this ship came back; for five hundred years it traveled at nearly the speed of light, and it will be five hundred years again in getting back. We will only have lived a hundred years inside the ship, because of the relativistic time-shift, but even that is long, long—and a thousand years will have gone by when we return..." For an instant, Henry caught the note of utter longing in the Martian's voice, and he knew that he himself would never have had the courage to attempt that dreadful journey. "Even for a race as long-lived as ours, a hundred years is long, and a thousand years longer. We can never really return. The civilization of Kiarios will still be there, unchanged, but all that we knew, all our friends and kin and *etai* ("I can't translate that," said Thornton) will be in the tombs, and we will live alone." The head lifted again, the eyes blazed with the old iron pride that had carried the race across space and time and conquered a planet's death to do it. "But the blood of Mars will live! The race will have been to its ancestors and returned with their strength."

"Your ancestors are gone," said Thornton quietly. "The old cities are crumbled in ruin, and your kin of Mars is dust on a lonely wind."

"So we feared, so we feared. We had hoped—But no matter." Again the undying will which had defied time and space and death, which had vanquished worlds and crossed the stars. "If Mars is indeed dead, if only the wind stirs between the hollow bones of the old ones, then still we have not come in vain. We know. We will bring back the knowledge of what happened to Kiarios, and our race will again have the past that it must have for its sanity. And on old Mars we will raise a cenotaph, and some day others will come to restore her."

"I wonder what the colonial commissions of our respective planets will think of that," muttered Henry in an aside to Uincozuma.

The Venusian grinned. "Unless the Martians will sign a thousand forms in triplicate, they won't like it," he said. Then suddenly, almost wistfully: "Damn it, Earthling, I like you; we're two sane men against a thing from outside older than all our races' memories. It's too bad I have to destroy you."

"Or I you," said Henry and added bleakly: "Or the Martians both of us."

5

THORNTON was talking to the Martian again, rapidly, and Henry saw the beaked face suddenly alive with an expression of—horror, disgust, almost hatred. Then steely control clamped down once more, it was again the face of an impersonal judging god, but for that instant Henry knew he had looked on death.

Uincozuma must have caught that fleeting glimpse. He leaned forward in the screen and said suddenly, softly and hurriedly: "That thing may be dangerous to both of us, Captain Henry."

"It may indeed." Glancing out, the Earthling saw the Venusian cruiser against the Milky Way. It was near, quite near, its shark form lay across the sky in deadly menace. It dwarfed the *Bolivar*. But its mass was insignificant beside the looming bulk of the *Delphis*, even though—even though the Martian vessel was so strangely empty—

"The Martians are unpredictable," said Uincozuma. "They may decide to sterilize our respective planets as a precautionary measure, or simply because our races don't fit their moral standards. At the very least, they may sneak undetected out of the Solar System—but that would mean destroying the *Xiucuayotl* and the *Bolivar* lest we carry word of their visit back to our planets."

"I don't like it," admitted Henry. He cast an uneasy glance over at Thornton and Herakon. The Martian was speaking now, slowly and weightily, and there was a tightening in the archeologist's gaunt face

which showed that even his pacifistic fanaticism was being shaken.

"You have guns, of course?" Uincozuma's urgent voice came harshly in his ears. "Stand by to turn them on the Martian, if the need arises. I'll go after those tubes or whatever they are at the stern—must be part of her drive, we may be able to disable her. Between us, we might be able to stand off, or capture her."

"And then have you open up on us, so that only Venus will know?" bristled Henry. "Nothin' doing, Commander; it's Earth that comes first with me."

"I admire your patriotism," said Uincozuma, "but it may cost your planet its life unless we can stop—"

Thornton turned and interrupted them. His face was very white. "The Martians don't—they don't like the idea of races as young and uncivilized as ours possessing space travel," he said tensely. "They say our technical abilities, far superior even to their own, outstrip our social culture so greatly that we're a danger to the universe and to ourselves—"

Henry could not resist a barbed answer to the aristocrat who had snubbed him during the many months: "Isn't that what you've been saying all along?"

"Yes, but—I never thought—the Martians are outsiders! Herakon says they think we shouldn't have the science we do. He says we may even find a way to travel faster than light, which the Martians know is theoretically possible but which they've never managed to put into practice—and then the whole Galaxy is in danger from us!"

"And what they think *should* be, has a nasty habit of coming to pass," murmured Uincozuma. "What do they propose to do now?"

"Their ship still represents a greater power than all the combined might of Earth and Venus." Thornton's voice was thick now, and he was shivering violently. "They're going to go on into the inner system and see for themselves. If matters are as I've described—and they are—I told the truth; I thought they'd understand—I thought their old

wisdom would bring peace to us—"

"You're a romantic," said Uinczuma, with a sardonic humor that somehow increased Henry's reluctant liking for him. That the Venusian could smile, however wryly, in this moment—"You thought because the Martians weren't actively aggressive that they were a race of gods or saints. They aren't; in some ways, they're crueler than we. They're certainly just as selfish in protecting themselves, or just as unreasonable when their morals have been offended." His voice rapped out: "What will they do?"

"They'll force us, Earth and Venus, to blow up all our machines, burn all our books, go back to barbarism—or else they'll rain fire from the sky till we do it anyway!"

"We—shall—see!" The Venusian's eyes narrowed. Suddenly he was snapping orders in his gutteral native tongue.

"They're going to attack the *Delphis*," choked Thornton. "Oh, no—"

"Why not?" asked Henry grimly. "More power to them." But he made no move toward his own intercom.

"But aren't you—won't you help—"

"No, you fool! Let the Venusians exhaust themselves against the Martians; we may find our own chance somewhere in the scramble, to come out on top of both the others."

"You incredible scoundrel—" Thornton took a step forward, the breath rattling in his throat. "The Venusians are our allies, fighting for Sol against this—invader—and you stand coldly by and let them die for—Earth—" He balled his fists.

HENRY STOPPED the clumsy lunge with contemptuous ease. His big hands seized Thornton's skinny wrists and pulled the taller man around with brutal force. "Shut up and behave yourself!" growled the captain. "You've made enough trouble already with your damned self-righteousness; you're no better than the Martians. I'm for Earth first and last and forever, because it's my planet, my home, my wife

and kids there—and to hell with the rest of the universe!"

"That's the sort of narrowness which has ruined— Oh, God!" Thornton's voice was almost a scream.

Henry saw the *Xiucuayotl* sweep in for the attack. He saw fire streak from her sides, a hailing hell of shells and torpedoes and blistering atomic-nitrogen flames, radioactive gas and saw nuclear energy, a ship-ruining barrage that would have left any Solarian craft in molten wreckage. And he saw the bombardment strike the dim blue haze around the *Delphis* and explode in a blue-white ravenousness of incandescent power.

Sight came back as the dazzle swirled raggedly away from his eyes. The *Delphis* loomed enormously, untouched, scatheless. Henry heard a voice choking, and was vaguely aware that it was his own: "They have the energy screen. Our own physicists think it may be possible, a screen of pure energy, impenetrable to matter—and the Martians have it; they've had it for a hundred thousand years—"

Herakon spoke, harshly and curtly, and Thornton's frightened eyes went to Uinczuma's taut face. "Having showed you—their defensive strength—" he mumbled, "they'll now show you—as little—of their offensive power—"

The Venusian snarled something inarticulate. It was terrible to see the high pride of invincibility crumbling in him.

And from the *Delphis* sprang a long finger of light, pure white light like a living sunbeam, and almost caressingly it felt out along the *Xiucuayotl*. Where it touched, steel puffed into vapor and open wounds gaped in the armored hull. There was no puff of air from those bulkheaded compartments; the air must have exploded outward at velocities too great for visibility, and every being in those sections must be dead, cooked in his spacesuit—

Invincible, impregnable, with a hundred thousand years of science behind her, the *Delphis* could sail through space and not all the weap-

ons that Earth and Venus together could hurl at her would change that inexorable course. She could hover beyond a planet's atmosphere, and that beam of living energy could slash across continents and explode cities into white-hot gas, and civilization would crash to nothing.

But damn it, damn it, the ship was only one vessel, it was one hollow vessel, all but empty—it wasn't reasonable that—

UINCOZUMA'S haggard eyes sought Henry's. The Venusian was trembling with rage and grief and the dawn of fear. He said, very slowly and bitterly: "We had best start to bargain with them, Captain Henry."

"Yes—no—wait—" The Earthling's gaze swung back to meet the bright gold of Herakon's. There was something funny about that Martian. He wasn't the judging god any longer, however hard he tried to be; he was just a shade too tense and eager himself. Could it be—

A hollow ship five hundred light-years from home, facing two alien races of incredible technical skill, races which might have done almost anything in the long time since they had been left behind—*How would you feel, Moss Henry? How'd you like to be up against that?*

Wait—wait! No, by Heaven! Could it be—COULD IT BE—

His hands were shaking so badly that he could hardly grasp pencil and paper. He had to figure now; he had to think as coolly and clearly as man had ever thought before—and that under the lash of time, with a finger of pure energy waiting to reach out and touch him—*Stall them off! Stall them both!*

"Thornton," he said, "ask the Martians if all their weapons are energy weapons."

"Why—well—all right." the archeologist turned back to the stranger. He had the look of an utterly beaten man. Presently he looked around again.

"Herakon says yes, as far as this ship is concerned. After all, *The Delphis* did not come expecting to

fight anybody. He sees no harm in admitting that all the defensive and offensive strength of this vessel comes from the main drive-converters. And he adds that they have many forms of energy weapons other than what they have just shown us."

"I don't doubt it." *Damn it, what are those Einstein formulas now? Ah, yes—but my math is pretty rusty—* "Okay—Uincozuma!"

"Yes?" It was a dull tone; the Venusian hadn't admitted defeat yet, but he saw no hope of victory.

"Run for Venus. Highest acceleration your ship and crew can stand."

"Run? But why—"

"Carry word back, if nothing else. Not that the Martians won't let you, in the present situation, but—well—get out of range of their energy beam. Now! You'll still be in radio range. Quick!"

"Well—" Uincozuma smiled bitterly. "I suppose it's best. It will save one Imperial ship, to smash itself later against that screen. But you—?"

"I'll come as soon as I can. Having a little engine trouble right now. I don't think that beam is effective at more than fifty thousand miles. If you can get that far, you'll be safe."

"But Venus won't—
Get going!"

Uincozuma nodded, wearily. In his own indecision, the effect of a lifetime of naval discipline was to make him obey an authoritative voice. He gave his orders, and in moments the *Xiucuayotl* was splashing the void with rocket fire.

Henry worked on, unobtrusively computing. *Damn that integration! The mass-velocity formula—* "Herakon wants to know why the Venusian is fleeing," said Thornton.

Uincozuma bristled in the screen. Henry smiled humorlessly. "Oh, tell him it's to get word to his home planet as quickly as possible; he shouldn't care."

"He doesn't. *The Delphis* will be starting to accelerate for the inner planets soon. He wants you to give him figures for computing an orbit to Mars."

HENRY FROWNED. "I will, in a minute." He finished his calculation, and nodded. It worked. Yes, it worked. But he felt no special triumph; the hardest, most desperate gamble was just starting.

"Thornton," he said suddenly, "sprechen Sie Deutsch?"

"Eh?" The archeologist blinked, wondering if the madness of crumbling dreams had not also fallen on the captain. "Do I—do I speak German? No—but you—"

"You didn't think a dumb space-hound would know any foreign language? I know a few. I learned German to read Goethe in the original. But no matter—I'll have to take a longer chance—*Habla usted español?*"

"Si, naturalmente. Pero—por que?"

"It gives us a secret language," said Henry in Spanish, "unless Uincozuma knows it too, which is possible but doubtful." He glanced at the screen, but the Venusian was too busy with commands to pay them any attention. "The Latin units of

the Terrestrial fleet usually use English except aboard their own craft.

"Now listen—I'm about to pull the most colossal bluff in all history. If it works, we might still have a chance to salvage something—we may even end up a little better off than we were. If it doesn't—the *Bolivar* is finished, but Earth is in no worse fix. Not that it could be." Henry smiled thinly. "But you've got to be my interpreter with Hera-kon. No matter what I say, you've got to look unsurprised and render it exactly into Martian. Got it?"

"I—yes." Thornton nodded, something of his self-possession returning to him. *He isn't a bad fellow, thought Henry. He's just been living too long in his own ideal dream-world.*

"Okay. Now—Uincozuma." The Venusian's image was getting a little fainter and blurrier on the screen with distance, but it was still clear enough. "Are you out of energy beam range?"

The voice was tight with the strain of brutal accelerations: "Not

[Turn Page]

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quite, I think. But I should soon be."

"Now look, Uincozuma. That Martian ship is powerful enough to destroy our combined fleets and lay waste our home planets—and it intends to, for its own safety and its people's. We may be able to bargain. The Martians aren't devils; they'll agree to any proposal which looks reasonable to them. But it must guarantee them absolute safety from us."

"To be sure. Have you any suggestion?"

"I have a vague sort of idea kicking around in my head, but we'll have to bluff and bargain. In the end, of course, we'll have to yield to whatever they say; theirs is the final word. But I just might be able to trick them into thinking we're more powerful than we really are."

"How?"

"I'd rather not say, just now. It's too nebulous in my own head. I just want you to back me up in whatever I may do or say. Don't look surprised, whatever it is."

Uincozuma sat pondering while the seconds fled by, and with each instant his dwindling ship was farther away, safer from destruction. At last he nodded. "Why not? I'll do it, Captain Henry; somehow, I trust you."

"Good!" Henry grinned, almost wolfishly, as he faced back to Thornton and said in Spanish: "I wonder what our dear green friend will say when he finds how we're going to use his trust?"

"You mean you'd betray him—for Earth's advantage—"

"I told you I'm first and foremost an Earthman. But now to the Martians. Tell Herakon that I've guessed his secret. Tell him that the *Xiucuayotl* is safe from him now, bearing word of his fatal weakness back to Earth and Venus."

"What?"

"You heard me. Quick, now! And for the love of mercy, don't look so astonished. Act natural!"

THORNTON looked shakily toward the screen and rattled

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Did you think the cover was better than last issue's?

as good as last issue's? not as good?

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.....

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Welcome, welcome, welcome to the science fiction parade! There's a special thrill in picking up Volume 1, Number 1 of a new magazine devoted to our favorite art. It's a bit like being a god-father; with the pleasure of looking down on the lusty brat come sober thoughts and hopeful schemes for his future greatness. May your magazine grow up to be great—and many happy returns!

Let me say this on the outset: you're off to a fine start, and there is lots of room for improvement. Which is as it should be. Let's start with your name, *Future*. I think it is a happy choice, one with plenty of scope and appeal—and something to live up to.

About that mast-head: it's austere simplicity is not without appeal, but why don't you give it a distinctive background, mat or frame to set it off from the rest of the cover? Which brings us to that eternal Waterloo of the serious science fiction fan who likes to think of his

hobby as something possessed of a considerably higher IQ than "Kolossal Krine Komiks", or such. Most science fiction art editors seem to belong to a secret conspiracy (doubtlessly inspired by the scheming purple spider-men of Arcturus) designed to force the purchaser of the magazine to carry it about hidden in a plain wrapper, or to slink around with it furtively, nursing a giant-sized guilt complex. Yours is no exception. Bergey's cover on your first issue is painfully stereotyped, for all its slick technique. Please try an intelligent cover just once (perhaps you could even get Bonestall to do one for you?) and watch the reaction.

Your inside illustrations are generally above average, although, at least in my issue, they seem to have suffered in reproduction. I realize that you have chosen a very highly competitive price—but you are in a field where quality is being demanded increasingly, never mind the price tag. Coming back to the illustrations; how about printing the artist's name along with the title of the story he illustrates?



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Of course, the only real test of your mettle lies in your stories. Here's where you show true promise—and no wonder, with such talent. Most of your stories seem to run to the fast-action adventure type, but within that class they're well above average. Here, briefly, is how I rate them:

1. "Battle of the Unborn" (Bliss)—this one is different, and despite a confusingly foreshortened ending, somehow cuts deepest of the lot.

2. "Nobody Saw The Ship" (Leinster)—the old master turns out a polished little opus without too much apparent effort. There are some "bugs" in its logic (pardon the pun) and it's just a bit too impersonal, at times, but it's good nonetheless.

3. A tie (a) "Dynasty of the Lost" (Smith)—a good old-fashioned action-packed yarn built around familiar themes, though the title seems a bit far-fetched.

And (b) "Imitation of Death" (del Rey)—proves that Lester can do it as well as Smith, given a few well-tried ideas, using less space to do it.

4. "Parking, Unlimited" (Loomis)—a well-paced, if not overly imaginative bit of science fiction humor. Always welcome, particularly where—as here—it is not too heavy-handed.

5. "The Miniature Menace" (Long)—as Smith and del Rey proved, an old-time recipe, sparingly used, can still be served piping hot as an appetizing dish. But a spendthrift loose in the pantry comes up with an indigestible concoction: mutants, clairvoyance, space patrol, alien invaders, amazon jungles, telepaths, and (heaven preserve us) the Wizard of Oz—ugh! Not badly written, but definitely overdone. Try again, Frank!

No features as yet—but that may come in time as you grow. All in all, a good start. May you go on to bring us in days to come what all mankind hopes for: an ever-better Future!

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Minority report—

I am very glad to see your new magazine. With its low price, it can provide excellent competition with other science fiction pulps.

As to the stories in your first issue; you had an excellent line-up of writers. In fact, if I had just read the title page, and no further, I would have guessed it to be an excellent issue. However, I read the stories—this was a big mistake. The short stories were, with the exception of "Parking, Unlimited", clustered. There was too much of everything but a clear-cut story line. Loomis' short was moderately amusing.

The novelties were better. Leinster's was rather good, but almost from the beginning we were told that the insects would bring the alien to his defeat. The main fault with Long's and Smith's stories was in the character development. I wonder why Smith didn't play up the idea of the machine searching for its god—that is, that which gave it life and a purpose with humanities search for its God. The three best stories were "Dynasty of the Lost", "Nobody Saw the Ship", and "Parking, Unlimited".

The cover is typical Bergey. I don't especially like it, but I suppose that it will sell the magazine. I prefer covers similar to those on "Other Worlds" or "Astounding".

If you ever use short science articles as fillers, please make sure that they are factual; some of your competitors don't. They present the scariest articles as fact.

I would like to change the subject and ask a question. What is science fiction? If I write a store about a group of people in a plane flying the Atlantic ocean, with motors failing so that the ship will most likely crash into the water, it would not be science fiction. If I had written it 40 years ago, it would have been science fiction. If I write a story today about a similar situation in a space ship between Earth and Mars, it is science fiction. But if I write a story today about animals that live in caves under the earth and try

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[Continued From Page 88]

forth a string of harsh sounds. Henry reflected irrelevantly on how peculiarly expressive the Martian language was. It had sung and wept with joy and sorrow, now it snarled with menace—it might not be a bad common tongue for all the planets. Someday.

Herakon was shaken. For a moment his hands lifted like eagle's talons; Henry quivered in expectation of the flame that would devour him—With a supreme effort, the Martian mastered himself. When he spoke, through Thornton, it was coldly and calmly.

"He asks—"

"In Spanish, man, in Spanish!"

"He asks what you are talking about; he says you must be mad."

"Then ask him if the relativistic equations are mad. Tell him I know he's been bluffing us. He ran his ship up to a speed that brought his own time rate up to ten times that of the outside universe. But by Einstein's formulas, the ship's mass must have increased in the same proportion. That mass—his kinetic energy—could only have come from fuel carried along. An immense amount of fuel, especially if you allow for his having to decelerate, too, and for his power requirements en route. When he started, over ninety percent of his ship's total mass must have been fuel.

"But his ship is almost empty now. That means he must have used up almost all his fuel getting here. He can't leave the Solar System till he gets more. He must be running on his last reserves of energy—and all his weapons, with their fantastic power needs, have to run off that store too.

"He can't stand off Earth and Venus; he's been bluffing! He can, at best, destroy a large percentage of an attacking fleet—but in the end his screens must go down, his projectors must go dark, and he will lie helpless before us.

"And Uincozuma is now out of range of his weapons, bearing the

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word of his weakness back to the united inner planets!"

Thornton spoke, the words stumbling over themselves in their haste, and for an instant Henry looked on utter despair waging a devil's war with a blind destroying fury in the Martian's eyes. Herakon snapped one grim command, and the awful flames leaped out—out, out, after the *Xiu-cuayotl* at the speed of light—but even their raging fury was swallowed by the sheer distance.

Uincozuma's hard face smiled bleakly in the telescreen. "Our ship's getting hot," he said, "But it's not worse than the refrigerating units can handle. What did you say to him, Henry?"

"I think I got him a little peeved," grinned the Earthling tightly. "But he'll cool off. Just tell Thornton to tell Herakon that you're one hundred percent with us. Tell the Martians to start talking turkey—fast!"

"Consider it said," nodded Uincozuma, and Thornton conveyed the word. The searching energy beams died.

"It's no good trying to destroy the *Bolivar*," said Henry to Herakon, via the Spanish language. "You can do it, of course, but you can't fight the Solar System. However, Earth and Venus aren't the mindlessly destructive barbarians you think. We're perfectly willing to bargain. It would be the greatest loss we have ever sustained, if you destroyed yourselves and your knowledge. Not that it would do any good. Sooner or later, we'd come looking for you, probably in faster-than light ships. Best you make a friendly agreement now, between mutually respectful equals.

HERAKON spoke, slowly, and there was defeat and despair in his tones. Thornton rendered it into Spanish: "You will never be satisfied, I see, until you have our scientific knowledge, which your own perverted ingenuity will quickly apply far more effectively than we ever could. But how can children grasp such powers without ruining themselves and the rest of the Galaxy? Best you give us fuel to go,

lest you learn too much for your own good. Or best we smash everything in our ship, and kill ourselves, as you suggest. It will be for your own race's good too."

"Knowledge is never evil," said Henry, "but sometimes it needs control. I admit that there are factions on Earth and Venus who should not be allowed to get possession of these new powers. But that can be arranged.

"Suppose, for instance, that Earth and Venus set up a council with control over the new powers, a council empowered and enjoined to keep peace in the Solar System. It would keep that peace, since nothing could stand up against its weapons; therefore it could as well be given control of all military forces, and would be. If it were set up democratically, giving each planet a chance to attain its ends peacefully, war would become obsolete. And if Mars—Kiarios—sent representatives with an equal voice on the council, since you would be in on the scien-

your own interests would be safeguarded. You would, in face, benefit, tific advances that will be made with the old Martian knowledge as a basis.

"And there need never be war."

Herakon sat quietly, digesting it, his strange golden eyes lost in thought. And Thornton looked with suddenly shining eyes on Henry and gasped: "You! You, the narrow patriot, are the one who thought how to get peace—"

"I'm still a provincial," said Henry tiredly. "I'll always put 'myself, my wife, and my little Harvey with the bandy legs' first. But—well, I have enough common sense to know

[Turn Page]



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that war is not the best solution for anyone concerned."

Uincozuma spoke, slowly and suspiciously: "What are you two talking in that language for? What are you plotting?"

"Plots," grinned Henry. "And what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing—now! But if you've betrayed Zamandar—"

Herakon spoke, gravely, and Thornton listened long before he said to Henry: "Briefly, he agrees to the proposal. He says it involves a certain risk, but that the gains for Kiarios and all other worlds are great enough to outweigh that. He'll go through with it. And—he compliments us. He says perhaps he misjudged our races."

"Well, tell him that there are elements on both planets who'll oppose the solution. Tell him he'll have to continue his bluff, that we'll have to spread an official story of the Martians forcing us, for our own good, to make this treaty. Once his ship is refueled and really invincible, we can let out the truth; in the meantime the concept of the Martians as the all-powerful altruists will be useful."

"Won't others guess the secret as you did?"

"They may. But there isn't too much danger. Your despised 'militarists' aren't as bloodthirsty as you think. I believe it'll work."

HENRY turned to Uincozuma. "Herakon has agreed to a compromise," he said. "He'll let our civilizations live. But he'll need adequate guarantees against any danger we carry; that means a control council for the new powers, with the Martians having an equal voice with Earth and Venus. It means—the end of war, Uincozuma."

"Well—" The aristocrat looked, briefly, glum. Henry thought wryly that he was out of a job now. "Well—I suppose we have very little choice. I'll carry his word to my planet."

"Good. I'll go to Earth. And we'll all meet the *Delphis* again, somewhere off Mars."

Henry bent over his controls, preparing to accelerate Sunward. He felt no great elation. He was too exhausted, emotionally, for that. But there was a quiet satisfaction within him.

He wondered if perhaps Venus and Kiarios had not felt the same way as he, had not looked for a peaceful solution which would guarantee their own safety. Mutual fear—that was the great destroyer. Races might wipe each other out, because they feared. They might all be equally glad of this enforced peace and cooperation—even though the force was the most shadowy structure of bluff and trickery. Once the council was set up, peace would be stable, but right now—

Vincozuma's image was fading on the screen as his hurtling ship went out of radio range. The Venusian smiled at the Earthling, the smile of one warrior for another, and said in perfect Mexican Spanish; "Adios, capitán. Hasta la vista!"

Ye gods—Vincozuma knew!"

But—wait! If he meant to betray the secret, he wouldn't have bothered to conceal his knowledge of Spanish; he'd been safely out of harm's way before the bargaining started. But he'd had to pretend not to know—or Henry, paralyzed by the old terrible fear of treachery and death, would not have driven his bargain with the Martians, would have sought some other solution which would not have been as satisfactory, to Venus as to Earth.

Vincozuma's on my side. He's a good fellow, that Venusian. And it's good to know his race can want peace as much as mine.

Looking over toward the other screen, Henry caught Herakon's eye. And for one fleeting instant, he could have sworn that it closed in a friendly wink, and that a chuckle vibrated in the long throat.

Ye gods—did he guess too? Did we all know? Were we all pretending to be fooled—for the sake of peace?

Suddenly Henry was laughing. He didn't stop laughing for a long time.

THE END

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[Continued From Page 86]

to run our lives (Shaver, you know?) it is fantasy. What is the difference?

The other question is: do any of you reader have any ideas on the problem of matter? Does matter consist of waves or particles? For instance, take an electron: it is indivisible, that is, it can't be cut in half. But if I run a stream of electrons through a double slit defraction experiment, I can prove by the pattern produced that the electron goes through both slits. Or, if it only goes through one slit, it "knows" that the other slit is there. The same problem exists for larger particles, such as protons. Especially confusing is light: it travels as a wave, but is emitted and captured as a photon, which acts like a particle. I will modify the middle of that statement, for light is only detected by destroying it in an interaction with matter, so that we always detect it as particle. If you try to explain how it acts in going through a lens, it is easy if you think of it as a photon (particle). This is a big paradox in physics today, and if any of your informed readers have ideas perhaps they can air them in *Down to Earth*.

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* * *
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[Turn To Page 94]

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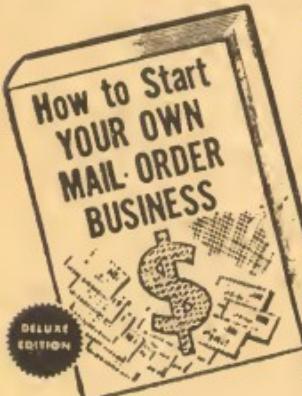
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tions are well drawn, though you could tell your artists not to use so much ink, because with the kind of paper you have to use, a drawing that is too black will reproduce as a smudge. Some of the ads are good reading. The price of the magazine is very good. Maybe one of these days you could have an illustration by Finlay, say, or a story by Ray Bradbury. That ought to be good. Well, now we come to it; I can't put it off any longer, I guess: next issue the stories will probably be much better; they would have to be, if you can guess what I mean. Now, don't get mad—you wanted honest opinions, didn't you?"

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* * *

Some like Bergey, some don't—but his covers sell the books!

Not only was the appearance of *Future* on the news stands a pleasant surprise, but most gratifying in the respect that science fiction will be able to have a new and another medium of expression via pulp. To begin with, the price is just about right in these days of costly publications, and I think that you should catch on fast and appeal to all, both young and old, if you can keep 'em coming at such a terrific impetus—with names such as George O. Smith, Murray Leinster, Frank Belknap Long, Noel Loomis, Lester del Rey, and James Blish. Yes, you really began with a bang-up issue, and one that will be remembered long, for not only having a line-up of superb and outstanding authors of science fiction, but because the stories were from *good* to *classical* in their presentation and way of formation. Truly, one of the best issues of a science fiction magazine I've ever had the pleasure of reading, and one that will be treasured in my collection for a very long time.

At this point, though, even if I think highly of your publication, it is hard for me to conceive any likeable thoughts or opinions for the illustrations used in the May-June is-

sue. I can't call them the worst yet to be presented, but then again I cannot categorize them better than mediocre. The cover illustration was excellent, and since the artist, Berger, has been a long-time favorite with another company, it's certainly high time that his talents are being utilized somewhere else.

I do hope that your caption at the head of your publications, "combined with *Science Fiction Stories*, means that you'll uncombine soon and bring us another publication to read...and believe you me, we certainly can credit ourselves with more science fiction publications, due to the fact that more than four or five of the steady science fantasy magazines that hit the stands are of a reprint nature.

I think you've done a wonderful job in bringing out your publication at a time like this, since we can certainly use more periodicals that handle fresh and new stories; who can realize or determine the number of prospective "greats" who haven't a chance of expressing themselves due to a lack of a large market?

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* * *

The "other artist" was Milton Luros.

Well! Well! As I live and breathe—what I've been waiting for has at last arrived.... May your return to the science fiction field continue to be as bright as your first issue has been.

I am one of the old guard who read each issue in silence, never daring to put forth my comments;

[Turn Page]

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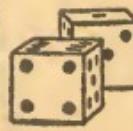
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your return has prompted me to drag out the old typewriter.

The first issue is already far superior to many of the magazines now cluttering up the stands. I'd rate the stories in this order: (1) "Nobody Saw the Ship"—a truly magnificent story, written by a master of science fiction. (2) "The Miniature Menace"—Frank Belknap Long has written a tale that almost equals that of Leinster's. (3) "Dynasty of the Lost"—somehow, the novel didn't quite measure up to those above, so Smith and his story repose in the third slot. (4) "Parking, Unlimited"—a nice short by Noel Loomis. (5) "Battle of the Unborn"—James Blish has come a long way, as this story will testify. (6) "Imitation of Death"—how could Lester del Rey have written such a story? It is the first time I have not enjoyed one of his tales.

Your cover is a lot better than the ones I remember on your other, older science fiction magazines. Bergey is good. However, I would like to see the cover alternated between him and Lawrence, or Rogers and Finlay. What a lineup of cover artists they would make!

As to your interiors, they were good, and some fair. Do not lose C. A. Murphy; he is as fine as an interior illustrator can be. Your other artist I do not know; may I have his name so I can keep my files accurate?

I would pick up Orban, Finlay, Bok, Paul, Lawrence, Krupa, Cartier, and Wesso as new artists. For new authors, I would like to see Van Vogt, Kuttner, Heinlein, Bond, Asimov, Williamson, Hamilton, and Bradbury. There are others, but it would take up too much space mentioning them all; I leave it up to you to choose the best.

One other thing: either have your artists sign their work, or put their names directly under their drawings.

There's not much to say except that I'll write from time to time, letting you know my gripes and praises.

Joseph Jesensky,
59 Beldon Street
Hartford 5, Conn.

*The gentleman has a point
worth considering!*

Congratulations on the finest first-issue I've seen in seventeen years as a reader of science-fiction. (Yes, I started a bit young.)

I'd like to discuss the stories in two groups: 1, 2, & 3, which are close together, and close to the top of any scale. "Nobody Saw the Ship", and "Miniature Menace" were particularly fine. These are tales with a heart-warming, constructive theme, good characterization for their length, and first-rate "atmosphere".

Number 5, "Parking, Unlimited," I'd dismiss as a "quickie"—not too bad, but mighty hasty in execution. Evidence that a plot-idea isn't enough, by itself, to make a good story.

Number 4, "Battle of the Unborn", and number 6, "Imitation of Death", are a different matter, particularly the former. They are well-written—but!

I am a psychologist by profession, doing pure and applied research on personality-dynamics and how they make us human beings behave as we do. Now I read for sheer enjoyment. I don't like to "think shop" after hours. However, both personally and professionally, I am disturbed by a recurring theme that keeps cropping up in the "best" of science fiction. That is, the story with a man or a world beset by evil, alien forces; and where the "solution" is one that is cold, inhuman, and extremely destructive. When the "humans" survive in this type of story, they are a long, long way from being decent, warm, friendly people, who can withhold judgment of the "alien" until they find out whether he *might* be reasonably decent, and not evil-reincarnate by a-priori assumption.

It is not the *plot* that matters here, but the kinds of *people* in the stories, how they think and feel, and how they try to solve their problems. "Alien menaces?" OK—but do the "humans" use savage, beast-like tactics to defeat the ene-

my? If so, how are they better?

If one were labelling the picture I've referred to, in a clinical setting, it would look remarkably like a paranoid pattern: projection of savage, animal hostility; blind assumption that "we" are all good, "they" are all bad, and "we" are justified in doing *anything* to defeat "them".

As I say, the trend is all too often blatantly visible in current science-fiction writing; not in all, but too much for my comfort, at least.

You will appreciate then, why I enjoyed Leister's and Long's tales. Smith's, however mechanical and stereotyped in characterization, did have the same basic idea. Lord knows how long we'll keep our civilization alive; but at least, while we live, let's explore some of the creative, constructive possibilities that humans are capable of. If we are to read for enjoyment, let's participate in decent attempts to build a good world and universe. God forbid we should admit Polyanna delusions. But we need *neither* extreme. We need emotional maturity, not all-or-none thinking that masks childish fears and hates in cold, "logical" rationalization. We need the kind of stories that will help restore us—not accounts of destruction to weary us further.

Robert F. Peck
1213 East 58th Street,
Chicago 37, Illinois.

THE END

RATINGS on the MAY ISSUE

1. Nobody Saw the Ship 2.25
2. Dynasty of the Lost 2.67
3. The Miniature Menace 2.99
4. Battle of the Unborn 3.87
5. Parking, Unlimited 4.25
6. Imitation of Death 4.25

The last two were almost tied, but the Loomis story received more 1st place votes. Most controversial was Blish's story; it received extreme reactions from both sides.

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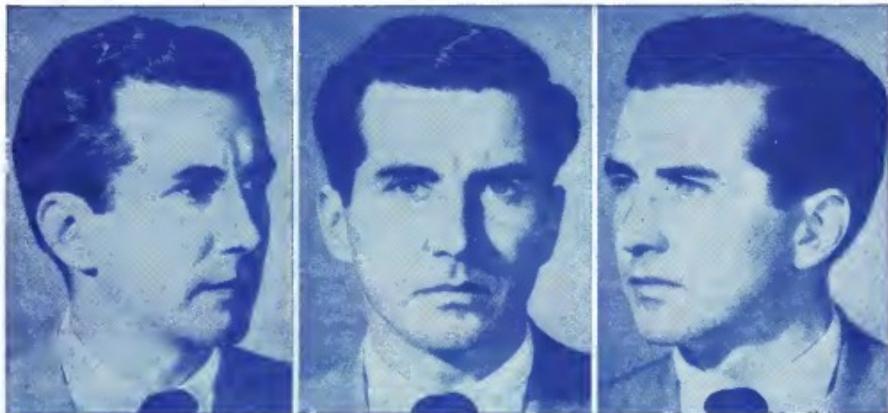
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